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THE S&S INTERVIEW: FROM 'POISON' TO 'CAROL'

TODD HAYNES

PLUS

- STEVEN SPIELBERG'S 'BRIDGE OF SPIES'
- PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON'S 'JUNUN'
- DANNY BOYLE'S 'STEVE JOBS'
- MOLLY HASKELL ON ROMANTIC COMEDY
- 'TANGERINE'

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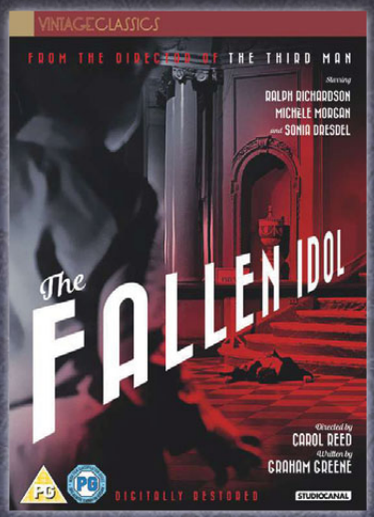

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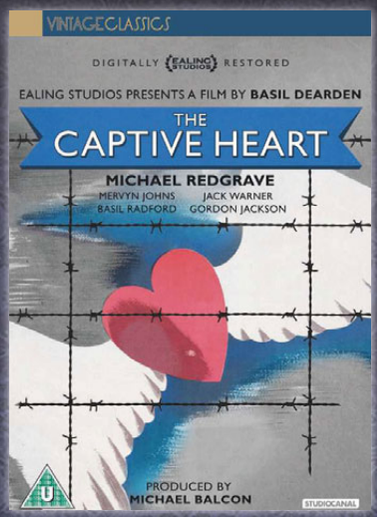

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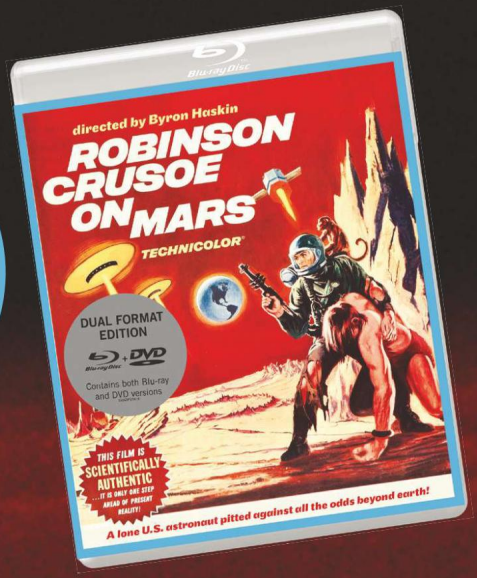

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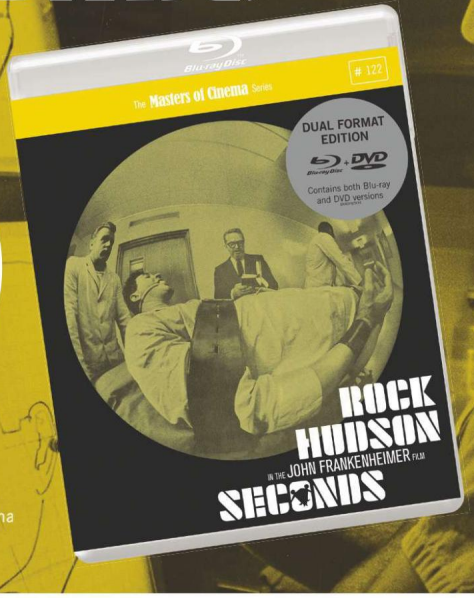

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Todd Haynes photographed by Nicolas Guerin/Getty Images. Retouched by DawkinsColour

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Editorial Nick James

ABRIDGE THAT ENDING

This month I give you two topics in this column for the price of one. The first is celebratory endings. In this issue you will see that we have both a very positive feature essay (see page 26) and a rather negative review (page 68) of Steven Spielberg's *Bridge of Spies*. That's OK as far as we're concerned: *Sight & Sound* is a broad church – we want you to read both – and Spielberg's films, famously, are not for everyone; just most people. My own view of the film is positive with some caveats: *Bridge of Spies* is vividly imagined and beautifully made, has terrific performances and many captivating scenes, but its Cold War existential doubt does not hang quite heavy enough. (I'm not really giving anything away in what follows, but for those of you who really prefer to know nothing going into the cinema, I suggest you stop reading now and return once you've seen the film.) The two ordinary/extraordinary men at the centre of the drama – Tom Hanks's lawyer and Mark Rylance's Russian spy – seem intended to give isolated insights into relations between the Soviets, the East Germans and the Americans, but the film's overview still seems distanced, omniscient.

Of course, these men are set aside from ordinary folk because they're 'in the game', and you can read the film either as a peeling back of the mask of real power games or as a boosting of American righteousness where it was perhaps largely unjustified. Or maybe, as Nick Pinkerton suggests in his essay, it's both. Spielberg is very good at giving the cinemagoer options for interpretation, so much so that towards the end the film offers two unsettling contradictions. First, the moral that Tom Hanks utters to a young East German bureaucrat, about ignoring what people say as long as you know you've done the right thing, is undermined when Hanks's character is then given a scene of public affirmation; second, the fate implied for Rylance's spy in the climactic exchange scene is undermined by a closing 'in actual fact' caption.

Problems with endings have featured in this column before (and indeed we have our regular celebratory 'Endings' column); but recent films, such as *The Martian*, as well as *Bridge of Spies*, have made me more aware of Hollywood's penchant for lengthy codas of self-congratulation. As a story, *The Martian* is over as soon as Matt Damon is rescued. Perhaps we the audience need to be brought back to earth a little gently, but it felt to me as though hats were being thrown in

Films such as 'Bridge of Spies' and 'The Martian' have made me more aware of Hollywood's penchant for lengthy codas of self-congratulation. Do we really need so much vicarious hugging?

the air for 20 minutes or more. *Bridge of Spies* doesn't shut off the drama so completely – after the climactic exchange drama is over, Spielberg wants us to compare a train ride through early 1960s Brooklyn with one through divided Berlin. But again, many of the closing minutes are devoted to Hanks being patted on the back and returned to the loving fold. Do we really need so much vicarious hugging to enjoy a movie?

My second topic is our 'Films of the Year' poll, which will be published next issue. We're notorious for not restricting our contributors to any other rule than choosing the five new films they've seen this year that they want to praise, whether or not the films have had any kind of release. We do that because we're an international film magazine and our contributors – and readers – live in various countries, making the release date moot. As the poll looms, however, I realise that there are many films of reputation which I haven't yet seen. One reason for that is the sheer volume of films now being released – more than 50 a month in the UK, although in some cases that 'release' is purely gestural, to obtain the DVD rights; and given the choice of platforms now being used, it's hard to keep track of what constitutes a 'real' release. Add to that all the interesting films that come along in festivals and we're more than chin deep. These ever-growing numbers do affect our poll: consensus becomes less likely, randomness more so. In the maelstrom of choice, judiciousness may be drowned out by favouritism. There are two actions that can help: our contributors can take this editorial as an alarm bell and hurriedly watch the films they've missed; and we can ask more people to take part. I'll do the former, and we'll do the latter. And, who knows, perhaps *Bridge of Spies* and *The Martian* will be in the running.

IN THE FRAME

A BLOW AGAINST THE DARKNESS

Into the labyrinth: Moon Sori in Zhang Lu's Borgesian *Love and...*

South Korea's democracy may be seizing up, but the London Korean Film Festival shows that its film culture is as dynamic as ever

By Tony Rayns

Full disclosure: I'm a programme adviser to the London Korean Film Festival, so I cannot pretend to critical objectivity when it comes to recommending this year's festival selections. In particular I programmed the new 'Emerging Directors' strand, which highlights the work of Lee Kwangkuk and Jang Kunjae, two genuinely distinctive talents who already have world-class achievements to their names. I've written more about both in the festival's brochure, and look forward to welcoming them to London.

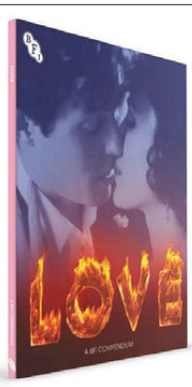
All festivals of one nation's cinema are inherently limited, but in recent years the LKFF has done a better-than-average job of representing Korea's film culture, still the most dynamic in East Asia. It sets out to strike a balance between mainstream hits (the soppy melodrama *Ode to My Father*, the nationalist sea-battle epic *Roaring Currents*) and arthouse/indie titles like this year's closer *Love and...* by the Chinese-Korean novelist-turned-filmmaker Zhang Lu, not forgetting animation, documentary and student films. Busan programmer Nam Dongchul has hand-picked and will present a selection of movies from his festival, and the veteran action director Chung Changhwa (best known in this country for his Shaw Brothers classic *King Boxer*) is coming from his California retirement to introduce and discuss three of his vintage Korean movies. The attempt to cover all bases seems admirable.

Love and... is actually a rather daring choice for the closing night, since – despite featuring top Korean stars Moon Sori, Park Haeil and Ahn Songki – it's far from mainstream. It's a Borgesian riddle in four chapters which starts with a dual-level fiction about a girl visiting her senile grandfather in hospital (this turns out to be the subject of a film-within-the-film) and then deconstructs it to produce a very witty meditation on presence and absence, love and hate, coherence and incoherence.

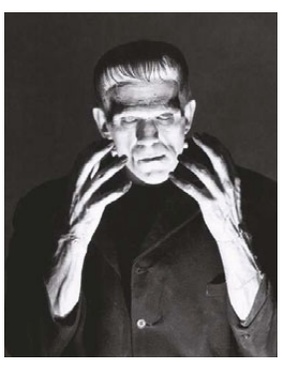
The most striking title in the entire line-up, I think, is a debut feature by Ahn Goocjin, a recent

ON OUR RADAR

BFI Love Compendium
Produced in the S&S office and published to coincide with the BFI's current celebration of all things romantic in films and TV, the new BFI Compendium (the fifth in the ongoing series of books, following entries on Hitchcock, gothic, Chinese cinema and sci-fi) features writing from a number of illustrious names – with many regular S&S contributors among them. Available at the discounted price of £15 from the BFI Shop.



'Fear Itself'
Critic and filmmaker Charlie Lyne follows up 'Beyond Clueless' with another film about the cinema, but this time swaps teen movies for giallo, gothic and slasher films, deconstructing cinema's capacity to unnerve. Available to view for a year on BBC iplayer, 'Fear Itself' examines horror classics such as 'Frankenstein' (1931, right) but looks beyond their well-known shocks, while also exploring films not associated with the genre.



Down the rabbit hole: Ahn Goocjin's 'theatre of cruelty' tale *Alice in Earnestland*

graduate from the Korean Academy of Film Arts. *Alice in Earnestland* had a remarkably successful North American premiere in Vancouver a few weeks ago, and there was much talk of "the next Bong Joonho" in the post-screening Q&A. The film combines dark political satire with bone-shaking farce in a way that happens in Korean cinema only once a decade: its precedents are Kim Sangjin's *Attack the Gas Station* in the 1990s and Jang Junhwan's *Save the Green Planet* in the 2000s. The Vancouver audience laughed nervously in the opening scenes, in which an obviously damaged woman ties up a psychotherapist, force-feeds her something very sinister, and makes her listen to her tragic tale of a life of frustrations and disappointments. The laughter dried up during the telling of the tale, which involves a misguided career choice; a sad-sack husband who loses his hearing, suffers an industrial accident and ends up in a coma after a suicide attempt; and a politically correct campaign against urban redevelopment which is hijacked by opportunists and run by a sadistic old militarist. Laughter crept back only in the closing scenes, by which time viewers had adjusted to the theatre-of-cruelty aesthetic, but the director was greeted with wild acclaim and gave smart, droll answers to audience questions.

South Korea currently has an ultra-right-wing government (the president Park Geunhye is the daughter of a former military dictator) which is busily trying to silence opposition voices. The festival in Busan has been the victim of swingeing budget cuts simply because it included the odd leftist documentary in its 300-film programme in 2014. With the next presidential election still two years away, the proponents of liberal democracy and open debate in Korea can't quite believe how repressive and vindictive their society has become. Ahn's black comedy defines contemporary Korea as "Earnestland" and strikes a credible blow against the darkness. By presenting a plurality of voices and opinions, the London Korean Film Festival implicitly argues for an open democracy. I hope it lives long and prospers. S

The London Korean Film Festival takes place at venues across London from 2-14 November

LISTOMANIA

COMING TO AMERICA

Brooklyn is the latest in a long line of dramas about the experiences of immigrants arriving in the US in search of the American dream

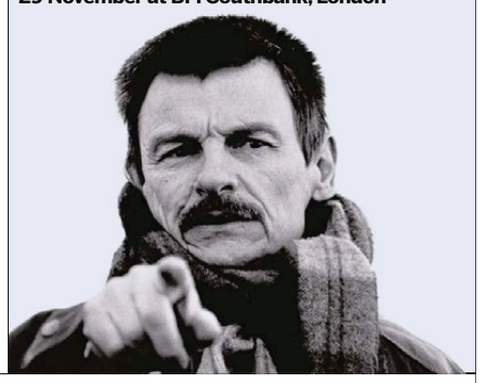
1. **The Immigrant (1917)** *Charlie Chaplin*
2. **America America (1963)** *Elia Kazan*
3. **The Emigrants (1971)** *Jan Troell*
4. **The Godfather: Part II (1974, below)** *Francis Ford Coppola*
5. **Hester Street (1975)** *Joan Micklin Silver*
6. **El Norte (1983)** *Gregory Nava*
7. **Good Morning Babylon (1987)** *Paolo and Vittorio Taviani*
8. **In America (2002)** *Jim Sheridan*
9. **The Namesake (2006)** *Mira Nair*
10. **The Immigrant (2013)** *James Gray*

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

ANDREI TARKOVSKY

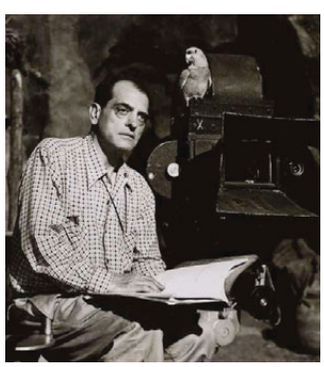
'Relating a person to the whole world: that is the meaning of cinema.'

The 'Mirroring Tarkovsky' season runs until 29 November at BFI Southbank, London



Animation festivals
The debut edition of the Manchester Animation Festival launches at HOME (17-19 November) with a host of new films, as well as workshops, masterclasses and a documentary tribute to Czech master Karel Zeman. Meanwhile, the largest animation showcase in the UK, the London International Animation Festival, returns from 4-13 December. Highlights include a survey of British animator Barry Purves and the UK premiere of Jan Balej's 'Little from the Fish Shop' (right), an adaptation of 'The Little Mermaid' which combines puppetry and CGI animation.

Luis Buñuel
A retrospective at the ICA, London, from 12 November – 6 December gives audiences the chance to see the seminal, subversive films of the great Spanish surrealist on the big screen. The screenwriter and novelist Jean-Claude Carrière will also be present to introduce some of his many collaborations with Buñuel (right).



WHEELS IN MOTION

The presence of a wheelchair in a movie without some attendant indication of misery or misfortune is a troublingly rare sight indeed

By Hannah McGill

The wheelchair used by Christine (Sylvie Testud) in Jessica Hausner's *Lourdes* (2009) is the site of a miracle, a fraud or an extraordinary coincidence. In a film whose central event lends itself to a range of interpretations, Christine's chair might be considered a symbol of all of the unwieldy earthly apparatus that separates us from the divine; or of the dependency and weakness instilled in those who look to religion to define their moral parameters. As a disabled pilgrim to the holy town, Christine – a quadriplegic with multiple sclerosis – embodies some of the unresolved awkwardness in the relationship between faith and disability: the expectation that God's will regarding a person's bodily health should be accepted unquestioningly, versus the fervent hope that He will change His mind in response to prayer; the positioning of suffering as a punishment for sin, versus the apparently random imposition of disability on the blameless. Her wheelchair and the body within it thus attract a range of responses, from disgust and pity to envy and fetishisation. A similar emotional spectrum might be said to apply to other wheelchair-using characters in cinema, and to screen attitudes to disability in general.

As the most obvious external signifiers of physical disability, wheelchairs of course function frequently as straightforward emblems of affliction – usually tragic, though distinctly sinister in the case of *Dr. Strangelove* (1963). The fact that a user might appear otherwise able-bodied, meanwhile, dangles the convenient dramatic possibility of recovery, or of the disability going unnoticed. Frank Borzage's *Lucky Star* (1929) depicts a war veteran (Charles Farrell) as an ideal mate for a young woman (Janet Gaynor) but for the impediment of his wheelchair – which he is finally able to discard thanks to the magical therapy of trying really, really hard. *Love Affair* (1939) and its remake, *An Affair to Remember* (1957), portray disability as punitive, socially shameful and an impediment to true love – though possibly surmountable with enough good behaviour and determination.

More recent films overwhelmingly seek to avoid or subvert such notions of helplessness, social exclusion and passivity. Ron Kovic's conviction in *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) that he will overcome his paralysis is informed by romantic cinematic convention, but is overridden by his doctor's prosaic frankness: "No, let me tell you something, Ron. You will never walk again." Resistance to sentimentalised 'magical cripples' ensures that Christy Brown's awkwardness, alcoholism and anger are foregrounded in *My Left Foot* (1989); that it's the quadriplegic character in *Untouchable* (2011) who needs the life lessons, not the wayward young caregiver he befriends; and that *Inside I'm Dancing* (2004) emphasises the feistiness, independence and cheek of its young male wheelchair users.

Pilgrim's progress: Léa Seydoux's Maria pushes Sylvie Testud's Christine in *Lourdes* (2009)

Issues of compromised sexual potency stalk these and many other films with wheelchair-bound male protagonists. *Coming Home* (1978) and *Live Flesh* (1997) notably reverse the assumption that wheelchairs and sex lives cancel one another out: paralysed veteran Luke (Jon Voight) cuckolds able-bodied Bob (Bruce Dern) in the former, while in the latter, Javier Bardem's paraplegic cop is not only presented as far less of a sexual 'cripple' than other men in the narrative, but is actively eroticised.

Lourdes revisits and complicates cinema's historical investment in miraculous cures for the disabled, and in doing so highlights the hypocrisy inherent in cinema taking the odd break from its promotional campaign for physical perfection in order to romanticise a character who is unable to walk. If the superstitious mass hysteria abroad at the shrines of *Lourdes* assumes that the wheelchair must be kicked away in order for Christine to live a fulfilled life, the film industry tends only to glorify disabled people with the comforting caveat that they are played by the able-bodied – a recent talking point around the casting of Eddie Redmayne in the Stephen Hawking biopic *The Theory of Everything* (2014). The audience can engage with the theoretical struggles of disability in the knowledge that the performer got up and walked at the end of every shooting day. (Well, with the exception of Daniel Day-Lewis, who stayed in a wheelchair for the duration of the *My Left Foot* shoot.)

If wheelchairs that aren't just props are rare

Tilly Hatcher in *Beeswax* (2009)

Javier Bardem in *Live Flesh* (1997)

KOBAL COLLECTION (2)

The wheelchair used by Christine in Jessica Hausner's 'Lourdes' is the site of a miracle, a fraud or an extraordinary coincidence

on screen, so too are disabled characters whose mobility or lack thereof isn't the point of their presence in the narrative. Presumably, disabled tourists have visited Lourdes without the slightest interest in a miracle – but the presence of a wheelchair in a movie with no attendant indication of misery or misfortune feels as rare as a manifestation of the Virgin Mary. In *Notting Hill* (1999), Bella (Gina McKee) is almost allowed to use a wheelchair without comment, until a conversation between the film's able-bodied central couple about the cause and consequences of her condition. In his book *Disability and the Media: Prescriptions for Change*, Charles A. Riley II bemoans the "play for pity" that turns Bella into "a tragic heroine... rather than a member of the comic ensemble". Andrew Bujalski's *Beeswax* (2009) is extraordinarily uncommon in having a character whose wheelchair use is neither glossed over nor made into a plot point. It simply isn't mentioned. We see Jeannie (Tilly Hatcher, a wheelchair user in real life) assemble and disassemble her wheelchair, and have her legs massaged, but what's 'wrong' with her body is not part of the film's story. Her chair is not a symbol of anything: it's part of the mundane everyday stuff with which the film concerns itself. Hardly a miracle, but a noticeable departure from the norm. S

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (3)/RONALD GRANT ARCHIVE (1)

THE FIVE KEY...

EPIC ROMANCES

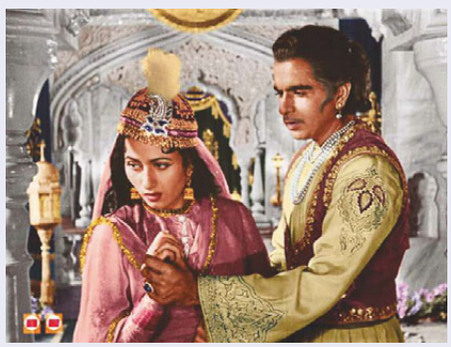
Marry the intimate to the spectacular, the swoon of a kiss to the swirl of battle, and box-office action is almost guaranteed

By Kate Stables

Mapping an up-close-and-personal central love story on to a big historical canvas, the epic romance's wide appeal (particularly to women) has wooed vast audiences since 1925's *The Big Parade*. Its high point, in terms of popularity, was the 60s: the cast-of-thousands exoticism of *Cleopatra* (1963) and David Lean's hugely ambitious *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), on welcome rerelease in UK cinemas from 27 November. But the CGI-confected, class- and gender-inflected 1997 blockbuster *Titanic* proved the genre's unsinkability, despite an unnerving failure rate (*Australia*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Cold Mountain*). Here we're hymning the epic romance's potent combination of spectacle and intimacy.

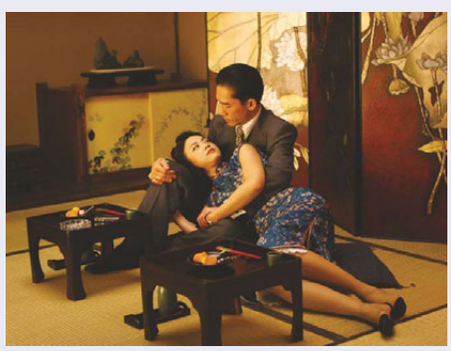
1 The Big Parade (1925)
King Vidor threw a heady mix of comedy, romance and melodrama into the first realistic war drama ever made, raising the stakes in the love affair between John Gilbert's rich kid turned doughboy and Renée Adorée's French peasant. The grim march through Belleau Wood, American ranks decimated by snipers and machine-guns in 'a ballet of death', retains the power it exercised on a teenage David Lean.

2 Gone with the Wind (1939)
The epic of epics, with themes still so central to American culture and politics that its romanticised view of slavery, sex and Southern plantation history remain fiercely disputed. When the critic Lou Lumenick wrote a column last summer criticising the film, rumours of an impending ban had consumers panic-buying Blu-rays, sending it to the top of the charts: frankly, we do give a damn...



3 Mughal-E-Azam (1960)
K. Asif's lavish, years-in-the-making recreation of the doomed love story of Mughal prince Salim and dancer Anarkali is a lush landmark in Indian cinema. Most memorably, it erupts from black and white into a twirling, mirror-spangled Technicolor spectacle for the song 'Pyar Kiya To Darna Kya'. The vast battle scenes – 8,000 soldiers, 4,000 horses, 2,000 camels – have an astonishing grandeur.

4 The English Patient (1996)
Chiselled from Michael Ondaatje's dense bestseller, Anthony Minghella's adaptation looks back to Lean's sweeping epics of the 60s, with its eloquent desert landscapes and winding non-linear storytelling, and Gabriel Yared's evocative score. Ralph Fiennes and Kristin Scott Thomas's portrayal of feverish desire is complemented by a moral complexity elegantly questioning everything from marriage to national loyalties.



5 Lust, Caution (2007)
Its battles may be savagely enacted only in the bedroom and at the mah-jong table, but Ang Lee's exquisitely detailed World War II occupation drama, about the slow-burning illicit affair between an undercover spy and a brutal Shanghai police chief, has the historical and emotional heft of an epic. A dark sleeping-with-the-enemy romance that's as psychologically nuanced as it is sexually explicit.

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

Paul Thomas Anderson's *Junun* is a gentle, modest record of a musical collaboration – and part of a big change in the way we watch film

By Sam Davies

Anyone who has ever spent time recording music or film knows that an alarming percentage of the time consists of waiting: for engineers, for the light, for microphone set-ups, for tuning. *Junun*, the new film by Paul Thomas Anderson, starts with a wait of its own. A group of musicians are sitting cross-legged in a circle, instruments in their laps, listening patiently as the afternoon call to prayer from a nearby mosque drifts in through the windows. When it finishes, they begin.

The players are Shye Ben Tzur, an Israeli composer, singer and guitarist; the Rajasthan Express, an Indian qawwali group; and, most recognisable to Western audiences, Jonny Greenwood, guitarist of Radiohead. The studio is the immense 15th-century fort of Mehrangarh, standing on the heights over Jodhpur, Rajasthan. Led by Ben Tzur, the music is a fascinating mixture of textures, melodies and rhythms: Ben Tzur sings long, extended melody lines (often in Hebrew), while the qawwali ensemble adds harmonium, group backing vocals and the percussive power of dholak and nagara drums. A brass section contributes, and so do two female vocalists, Afshana Khan and Razia Sultan (qawwali, a musical tradition that comes from Sufi mysticism, is customarily a male preserve). Greenwood plays guitar, bass and an early electronic instrument, the ondes Martenot. The result is a beguiling mixture of the devotional, the raucous punch of a marching band and the slow-build intensity of classic qawwali.

Other lulls in *Junun* are enforced by India's patchy power grid. Anderson, off-camera, asks nagara player Nathulal Solanki, flat on his back, what's going on. "India has failed. Like we always say, everything is possible in India: 'No toilet, no shower, but full power, 24-hour,'" Solanki responds. "Today is no power."

Technical troubles intervene: a dinky Casio SA-46 keyboard needs batteries, a harmonium (a central instrument to the qawwali tradition) needs tuning. These errands are run in downtown Jodhpur, a lo-fi drum machine pulsating under night shots of moped-packed streets, which could almost be outtakes from a *Quadrophenia* remake. And at one point Greenwood has to chase the group into action before a battery expires and stops all work for the evening.

Yet *Junun* generally has the relaxed playfulness of a working holiday: Anderson is on the job, yet clearly free of the suffocating care and attention to detail required to produce weighty pieces like *The Master* (2012) or *Inherent Vice* (2014). There are numerous small informal touches. Focus or depth of field are corrected mid-shot. Filming the musicians from a hallway with an obstructed view, Anderson simply picks up the tripod – the image pitching and yawing accordingly – and plonks it down closer. And then does it again.

One thing *Junun* refuses to do is explain itself: there is a bare minimum of captions identifying places, dates, names, but there are no interviews with either Ben Tzur or Greenwood. Greenwood's presence is so low-key you almost have to check that he's co-credited on the album. Rarely centre-shot, he instead can be spotted in corners of rooms and frames, hunched over a bass or laptop, face obscured by his hair.

Low-key presence: Jonny Greenwood in *Junun*

'Junun' treats the music with respect: takes are shown from start to finish, closing cadences allowed to hang in the air

No one explains the genesis of the project, or indeed what the project is. Anderson is essentially a Frederick Wiseman fly on the wall. Or rather a bird – one strand of the film concerns a dove which likes to sit in on proceedings, perched on a hanging used to baffle ceiling reverb. Though he is chased out with the pointy end of a microphone stand, at other moments Anderson's camera takes a bird's-eye view itself of the exteriors and backdrops, using a remote-controlled drone to capture stunning slow-rising shots of Jodhpur's sprawling roofscape and the valley over which lies Mehrangarh fort. At other times the camera becomes hypnotised by the ensemble aerial geometry of the birds that wheel around the fortress's roof and the heights of the city. One fantastic shot has the camera descend slowly from above the birds' interlocking arcs as they circle the scraps of meat flung into the air from the battlements by a local.

Israeli musician Shye Ben Tzur

But *Junun*'s focus is on the music. In its insistence on a bare-bones approach – no idle chatter, just performance – Anderson's film recalls *From the Basement*, a TV series put together by the music producer Nigel Godrich, who was involved in a number of Radiohead's albums and who is glimpsed occasionally in *Junun* overseeing the recording process. *From the Basement*'s approach to putting music on television was no-frills: a band performing live to a barely visible handful of people in a subterranean London studio. It was closer to a filmed version of a John Peel session than the in-the-round hoopla of *Later... with Jools Holland* (though *Junun*'s slow circular opening pan around the musicians is reminiscent of that show's opening ritual).

Like a Peel session or *From the Basement*, *Junun* treats each piece with due respect: takes are shown from start to finish, closing cadences allowed to hang for a moment in the air.

Anderson's approach is to document rather than interrogate, but questions proliferate: how did Greenwood get involved? How have Ben Tzur and Greenwood recruited this particular selection of musicians? How has Anderson ended up there? Is he returning a favour to Greenwood – who scored *There Will Be Blood*, *The Master* and *Inherent Vice* – or does he have a more substantial personal interest?

Junun's silence about itself is double-edged. It has an openness and humility – a determination to let the music speak for itself. Yet it's also a touch defensive, perhaps to prevent anything too inadvertently pompous or foot-in-mouth.

The history of Western pop musicians collaborating with their peers from the developing world is long, and not always distinguished. George Harrison's interest in Indian music, and eventual friendship with Ravi Shankar, is probably the best known example from the 1960s, but the Rolling Stones' Brian Jones recorded the Master Musicians of Joujouka in the Atlas mountains of Morocco. More recently Damon Albarn of Blur recorded two albums with Malian musicians.

Paul Simon's *Graceland* project defied an artistic boycott of apartheid South Africa to incorporate the music of the townships, to the fury of many anti-apartheid campaigners inside and outside South Africa. There is still real critical ambivalence over the album: how does collaboration across such gaps avoid becoming appropriation? Around the millennium, producers like Just Blaze, DJ Quik and Timbaland filtered rhythms from Indian musical traditions into American hip-hop and R&B through sampling. When Quik failed to clear a sample of the Indian singer Lata Mangeshkar for the track 'Addictive' by Truth Hurts, Bappi Lahiri, composer of the sampled song, sued Quik's label for $500 million; the album was withdrawn from sale and the suit settled for an undisclosed sum. Jay Z and producer Timbaland were also sued for copyright infringement in a long-running legal battle after sampling an Egyptian love ballad, 'Khosara Khosara', for their 2000 track 'Big Pimpin' – though they have recently won the case.

"A very unusual coming together" is how the gentleman introduces Ben Tzur, Greenwood and co at an unscheduled appearance at a Jodhpur festival. With no explanation of how or why the Israeli composer became so involved in qawwali, the music is left to speak for itself. The closest *Junun* comes to expressing any view on these vexed issues comes obliquely, from a musician of the Manganiyar caste, a Muslim community of the Rajasthan desert, who comments: "I believe all kinds of gods, like Muslim god, Hindu gods, all kind of gods... I can play in a mosque, in a holy tomb and also a Sufi shrine. All traditions we are..."

Almost as interesting as the film itself is the way it has been unleashed on the public. *Junun* made a simultaneous debut at the New York Film Festival and online on 9 October, through the streaming service Mubi – short-circuiting completely the typical release hierarchy by which a film will move from festival to cinema, DVD to digital. Mubi's model is to provide a slate of 30 films to subscribers, one expiring and one being added to the list each day, with the selection leaning heavily towards world cinema, arthouse, silent and the unfairly overlooked. Whereas normally the schedule of upcoming films is hidden – and part of the pleasure of the service is the daily micro-gift of seeing what's been added – *Junun*'s premiere was announced well in advance. This was in part because of the cachet of securing a new and exclusive Anderson production, but it's also part of a wider trend. Mubi was the only way for UK viewers to catch *From What Is Before*, Lav Diaz's follow-up to 2013's *Norte, the End of History*, when it was available to stream earlier this year.

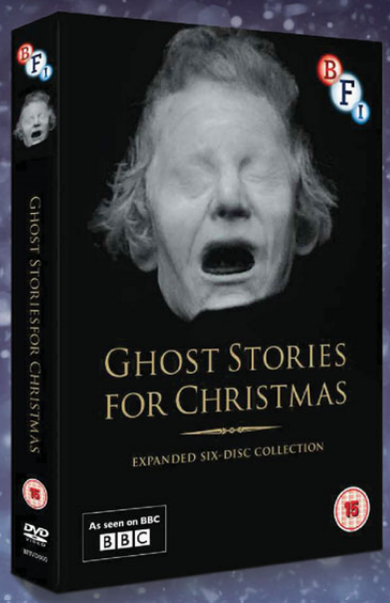
That film offers an instructive contrast with *Junun*. The argument has often been made that streaming, via Mubi or more commercially minded competitors like Netflix, will change entry conditions for film releases, allowing stranger shapes to fit through the door. Recent developments are beginning to bear that out. Whether an hour-long documentary like *Junun*, a slow-flowing six-hour epic like *From What Is Before* or a film like Gust Van den Berghe's *Lucifer*, shot with a circular rather than rectilinear frame, all three would have been hard to sell theatrically beyond the festival circuit. For the home viewer, free to pause, to rewind and to take the plunge if the cost is already covered as part of a subscription, exposure to the stranger fringes of filmmaking becomes that little bit easier. Streaming is also hastening a wider convergence between film and TV: a Netflix-produced season of *House of Cards* might be watched in a single 12-hour binge, as could Bruno Dumont's Lynchian four-parter for French TV *P'tit Quinquin*, whereas Diaz's slow cinema can be more practically consumed in two or three sittings.

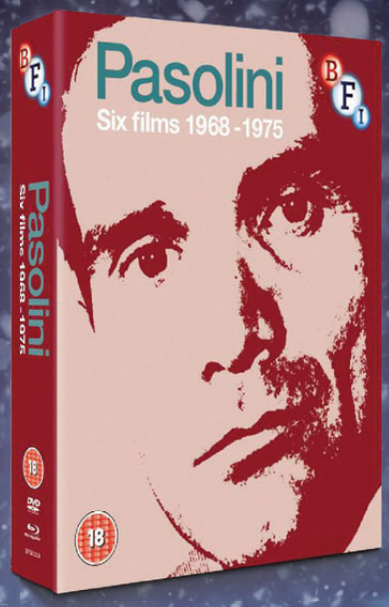
The next significant shift will be for a niche online curator like Mubi to venture into production, as Netflix has with both television formats and, now, with Cary Joji Fukunaga's feature *Beasts of No Nation*. *Junun*, in its modest intention to be a crisply produced, clear-eyed picture of an unusual recording session, will likely only be of lasting interest to those with a lasting interest in the music itself – no one will be arguing for it as more than a minor entry in Anderson's filmography, one perhaps better bracketed as a short than as a feature. But it may be looked back on as another small step towards a very different cinematic terrain.

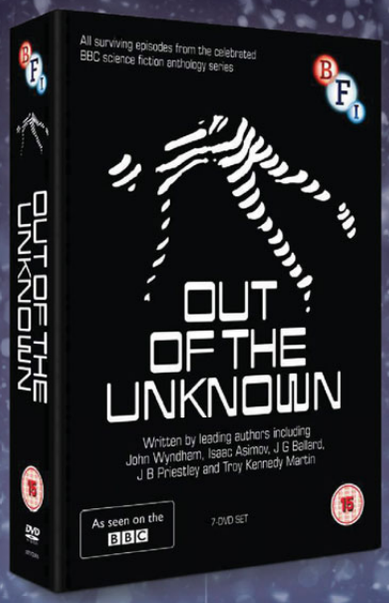
***Junun* is available to watch on the streaming platform mubi.com**

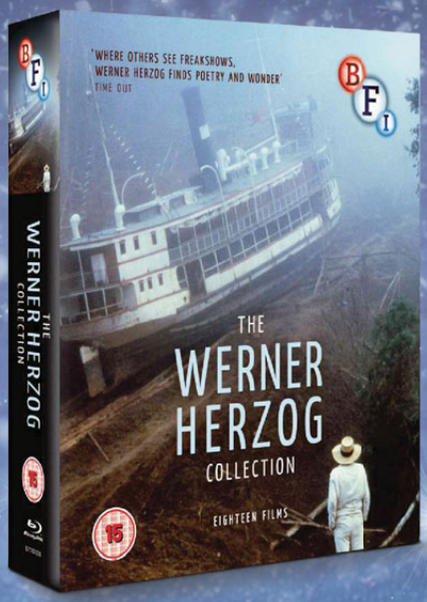
Fort experiment: the musicians and crew of *Junun* at the 15th-century fort of Mehrangarh

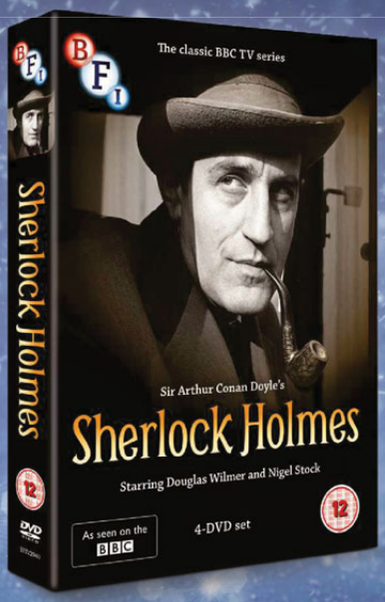
BOXSETS FOR CHRISTMAS

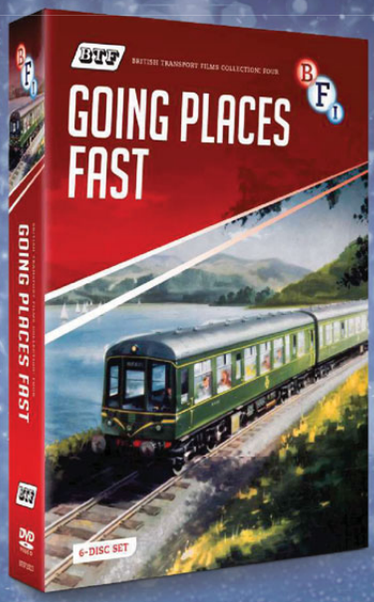












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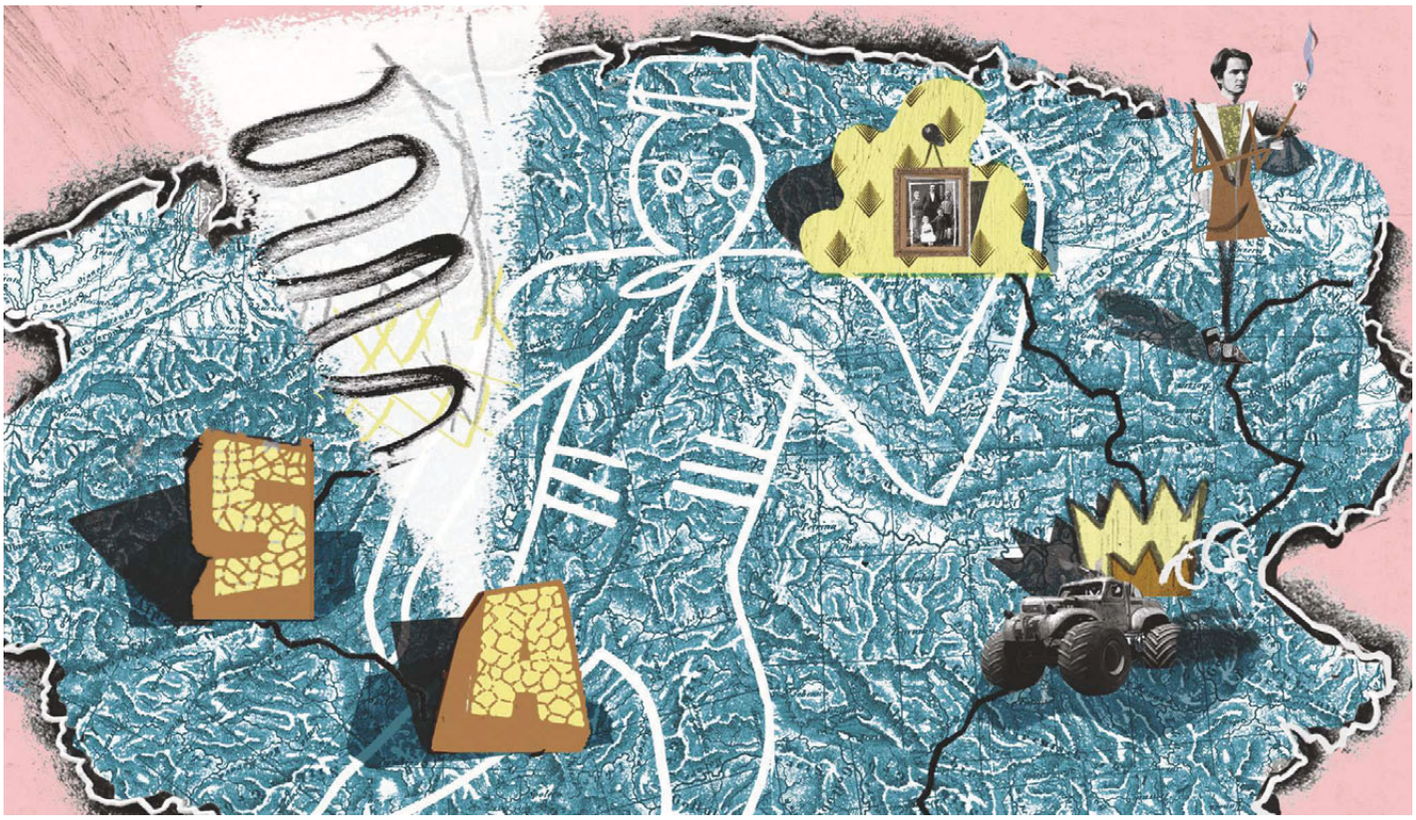


Films have always excelled at making us happy, providing a kinetic rush that takes us out of our selves and allows us to soar

By Mark Cousins

A new *Star Wars* film is on its way. The hour after seeing the first *Star Wars* (1977) was one of the happiest of my childhood. I came out of the cinema like a bullet out of a gun and, as I ran back to the caravan where we were staying, I felt that I was flying.

I was 11, but films had made me happy before that. At home, on TV, I'd seen Gene Kelly dance in *On the Town* (1949) and *An American in Paris* (1951). His carefree, sporty elation made me feel the same. Soon after *Star Wars*, I watched Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960). When Shirley MacLaine ran to find Jack Lemmon at the end of the film – at night, at New Year, in windy New York – it seemed like a world shift. Then came European films. Jean-Pierre Léaud in Francois Truffaut's *Stolen Kisses* (1968) was Gene Kelly speeded up. Whippet quick, he skidded around a corner like Chaplin, lived for the moment, and got the girl.

As I grew up, I noticed that films didn't need to be happy to make me happy. Sergio Leone's *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968) is a brutal revenge western, yet Claudia Cardinale arriving by train, the camera craning upwards and the soaring Ennio Morricone music were three types of beauty running at the same time. I swooned, and swooning is akin to happiness. It's a kind of falling, where ordinary happiness is rising.

After that I discovered Hindi cinema, which is in the happiness business as much as Hollywood. *Sholay* (1975), a rethink of *Once upon a Time in the West*, has a song – 'We Will Not Break This Friendship' ('Yeh Dosti Hum Nahin') – which is as much about the joy of togetherness as *On the Town*. Around this time I also saw Norman McLaren's abstract animation *Begone Dull Care* (1949), which has no one in it, yet, as its title suggests, is a delight. It helped me see that my happiness wasn't just coming from seeing people on screen who were happy, the mirror neurons of recent neuroscience. As if to prove the point, Terence Davies's *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, which is drenched in violence and loneliness, thrilled me. The happiness that came from film form – the beauty of camera moves and music – could outweigh depicted suffering. And, more recently, *Mamma Mia!* (2008) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* were captivating.

To understand how this happiness works, I think of what else makes me feel that I'm riding the thermals: dancing, the open road, my partner, music, big vistas, learning, alcohol, buildings and other artforms. Each is an expansion. Each takes me out of my own head and into my body, or the head of someone I love, or a space bigger than myself. I've mentioned here before Sergei Eisenstein's idea of *extasis*, escaping the gravitational pull of self. I look at the above list of film scenes and notice how mobile they are. They're full of music, and music has privileged access to our emotions and nervous systems, but it's the kinesis of the movies I mention which creates much of their delight – even the slow movement of Davies's tracking shots. Many of my favourite directors – Ozu Yasujiro, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Tsai Ming-liang – don't really do movement, or make it tentative, but when the camera and the people in front of it seem to rush as if caught by a wind, there's a sense of elsewhere entering consciousness that sweeps it up and off to places it could not, itself, go.

What else makes me feel I'm riding the thermals? The open road, my partner, music, big vistas, learning, alcohol, buildings

That's what I mean by expansion. James Joyce wrote, "It pained him that... he did not know where the universe ended," but it's surely great not to know where the horizon is. Call it the rapture of self-loss, or the dissolution of self, or nirvana, or what you will. In Visconti's film *Ludwig* (1972), we are shown, for some time, the life and ideas of the 19th-century Bavarian king, but then he starts to disappear from the story. It's as if he dissolves and we are left with the mountains, and the gaudy castles he built. This always reminds me of the famous ending of Antonioni's *L'eclisse* (1962), in which the main character also disappears and we see, instead, the places where she once was. An even more famous example is the ending of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), in which the expansion is the ultimate one – to the end of the universe, beyond the present and beyond agency. All films should be space odysseys.

Next year is the 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's book *Utopia*. It imagines, with notable irony, a 200-mile-wide island where no problems are said to exist. It's a faraway place, this paradise of sorts – a place to visit, to get lost in, like happiness.

ILLUSTRATION BY ARTHUR CHIVERTON

DEVELOPMENT TALE

THE HALLOW

Petrified forest: Joseph Mawle plays a conservationist who antagonises some local woodland creatures while working in Ireland, in Corin Hardy's film

Corin Hardy's childhood fascination with movie monsters was the start of the long genesis of supernatural horror *The Hallow*

By Charles Gant

Born in 1975, Corin Hardy fell in love with monster movies when he was six years old, when he first saw the classic black-and-white version of *King Kong* (1933), late one night at his grandmother's house in Dorset. He was "terrified but also mesmerised", but also remembers "feeling really sad and emotional" at the end of it. "What was that? That was a monster, and it was real."

Next he discovered the films of the visual effects creator and producer Ray Harryhausen (*The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, *Clash of the Titans*), and then a broader mix of horror and creature features. As a young teenager, he found particular inspiration in *Evil Dead II* (1987). "It had a whole crazy life to it, like you could do anything. Every few minutes, something exciting happened that was outlandish and gory and cartoony. It made me want to make films."

Inspired by interviews with artists in *Fangoria* magazine, Hardy started to experiment with make-up effects and monster sculpting, and next came Super 8 and video shorts – "getting as much make-up effects and basic animatronics and latex squibs and things like that" – which he made with a group of pals who shared his particular enthusiasms. "We'd all club together and buy two rolls of Super 8, and then film everything in sequence, going up to the South Downs to find production value in epic locations. It was a little group of heavy-metal-loving kids."

At Wimbledon School of Art, Hardy found the one UK degree course at the time – technical arts interpretation – that allowed him to focus on special effects. Work experience at a prop-makers gave him further exposure to sculpting, moulds, clay, latex and animatronics. On graduation, he was all set to apply for jobs in the special-effects industry, when a tutor pulled him aside. "You want to make your own films," she told him, "and that's what you should do."

Hardy spent the next five years making the 30-minute stop-motion short *Butterfly*, having moved back home to his parents' East Sussex smallholding where he toiled in a dusty bike shed. To survive, he took freelance commissions, including sculptures for the Body Zone at the Millennium Dome. Then *Butterfly* was selected for the 2003 Edinburgh Film Festival. "That was a big moment," says Hardy. "I'd spent five years working without someone commissioning it or telling me that they wanted to see it. You don't know whether anyone is ever going to see it. So then to travel up to Edinburgh and watch it with an audience was a huge end of the project."

Video commissioners attending the festival showed an interest in Hardy, and he was asked to make promos for the band Keane, newly signed to Island Records, and yet to release their first album. Soon he was dragging them to the woods and unleashing fantastical woodland creatures – a precursor to his debut film *The Hallow*, which would follow more than a decade later. Many more pop promos followed – including for The Prodigy and The Horrors – in which Hardy honed his skill in bringing inanimate objects to life, trying out new techniques and blending with live action.

Butterfly also won Hardy a UK agent and, later, US representation. What followed was "roughly ten years of meetings and travels", during which the aspiring filmmaker would pitch one or more of the five feature ideas he had developed, each with a sketchbook containing creature artwork, concept ideas and storyboards. One of those feature proposals, then called *The Good People*, landed at Los Angeles-based Occupant Films, which at the time had made *All the Boys Love Mandy Lane* (2006) and which went on to make *The Wackness* (2007).

"I had a desire to make a horror movie that was based on fairy mythology," says Hardy. "As much as I love vampires and werewolves and zombies, I felt like they'd been regurgitated enough, and there's so much more out there. Fairytales in particular – there are hundreds of different ideas and rules and mythologies." Occupant's Felipe Marino developed the script with Hardy as joint screenwriters over a number of years.

"Although on paper and in treatment form, it seemed quite straightforward to tell a fairytale grounded in reality, it turned out not to be the case," says Hardy. "To make a film that balances those two things – the mythological and supernatural content with the organic, scientific, naturalistic elements – really was the challenge."

What emerged was the story of a conservationist who travels for a work assignment to Ireland with his wife and baby son, moving to a forest where he antagonises some local supernatural creatures: '*Straw Dogs* meets *Pan's Labyrinth*' became the elevator pitch.

While getting the script right was a long, slow process, finding finance for *The Hallow*, as it had by now been retitled, proved much quicker, with the UK's Momentum (later absorbed into eOne) responding enthusiastically, and then Altitude, Irish Film Board and some private-equity partners jumping in. Common to many independent films, cashflowing pre-production proved a challenge, with monies flowing in very close to principal photography. But it was particularly acute in this case, since *The Hallow* would be spending a lot of its cash on physical creature effects up front, rather than on digital effects down the line. Hardy turned to John Nolan (*Where the Wild Things Are*), who in his workshop in London's Stoke Newington "did a lot of beyond-the-call-of-duty work in order to make the film possible".

I had a desire to make a movie based on fairy mythology. I love vampires and zombies, but they've been regurgitated enough

As for casting, Hardy pushed for British actor Joseph Mawle, highly regarded in casting circles but more typically seen in supporting film roles. "I thought back to Dustin Hoffman in *Straw Dogs*, Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*, Jeff Goldblum in *The Fly*," he says. "Those are three phenomenal performances in genre movies that aren't conventional leading actors." The director says he "always felt supported", although there was certainly financier interest in pursuing starrier options.

In making *The Hallow*, which he edited in that same bike shed that became his animation studio, Hardy was able to make the kind of creature feature that first instilled him with a sense of childhood wonder. And in turning the wheel full circle, he employed his "lifelong friend" David Lupton, one of the gang of East Sussex teens making those early horror-tinged short films, to create a key prop in the film – an illustrated book about the 'Hallow' banshee creatures – just as he'd collaborated with him in the past on the crude inky animation of his award-winning Horrors video.

"Now I look back, it's strange," says Hardy, "I realise nothing's really changed. I still love heavy metal. I still want to make monsters and create things and make them feel real and thrilling. The long gap in between was spent just trying to get to this point."

***The Hallow* is released in UK cinemas on 13 November and is reviewed on page 76**

THE NUMBERS
SHAKESPEARE

By Charles Gant

It's been two decades since Kenneth Branagh and Baz Luhrmann delivered solid commercial movie hits with Shakespeare plays *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) and *Romeo + Juliet* (1997). The years that followed offered relatively lean pickings, with Michael Hoffman's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1999) and Al Pacino starrer *The Merchant of Venice* (2004) proving the best of the bunch, commercially. Ralph Fiennes's *Coriolanus* failed to scrape up £1 million when it was released in UK cinemas in 2012 – an indignity that was only compounded when London's Donmar Warehouse stage production starring Tom Hiddleston was beamed into cinemas, grossing £1.22 million to date. Conclusion: audiences would rather see a recording of a play than a relatively expensive film that had taken years to develop and many months to prepare, shoot and post-produce. Had the advent of the event cinema category effectively killed off the notion of the Shakespeare film?

Film distributor StudioCanal believed otherwise, acquiring UK rights for Justin Kurzel's current hit *Macbeth*, starring Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard. Very aggressively released into 400 UK cinemas, the film is the first Shakespeare to crack £2 million in this territory since Leonardo DiCaprio took on the role of Romeo.

Picturehouse cinemas chief booker Clare Binns comments that *Macbeth* "was always going to be a huge hit for us", and she wasn't daunted by the under-performance of Fiennes's *Coriolanus*, since it was too optimistically released in awards season "at a hugely competitive time", and the positioning ended up askew – "They bravely tried to make it bigger and go outside of its natural audience, and it looked like a horror film."

However, her optimism for *Macbeth* could never match her faith in Benedict Cumberbatch as *Hamlet*, beamed live from London's Barbican theatre by National Theatre Live: "We sold out ages ago. We sold out our encores. We sold out everything."

'Profit should hardly draw me here': *Macbeth*

In the event, *Hamlet* grossed nearly £1.8 million in UK cinemas from its live feed – the biggest ever for a Shakespeare play. As *Sight & Sound* went to press, most of the encore screenings had yet to occur, but *Hamlet* is clearly set to push past £2 million, and has a shot at overtaking the lifetime of Kurzel's *Macbeth*, from much more limited showings.

For Crispin Lilly, CEO at rival boutique chain Everyman, the pack is stacked in favour of event cinema. "There's just a fundamental difference in the release of these things," he says. "The National Theatre, the Royal Opera House, they release seasons ten months ahead. They mail-shot their members, they mail-shot theatre and opera databases. People are putting it into their diaries nine months out. With a film like *Macbeth*, with the best will in the world, with most of your above-the-line spend breaking three or four weeks before release, it's hard to position for audiences as an equivalent event."

SHAKESPEARE FILMS AND PLAYS AT UK CINEMAS

Film	Year	Gross
Romeo + Juliet (DiCaprio film)	1997	£7,438,055
Much Ado About Nothing (Branagh film)	1993	£5,505,603
Macbeth (Fassbender film)	2015	£2,317,568*
Hamlet (Cumberbatch RSC play)	2015	£1,902,004**
Richard II (David Tennant RSC play)	2013	£1,471,478
A Midsummer Night's Dream (Kevin Kline film)	1999	£1,460,417
Coriolanus (Hiddleston Donmar play)	2014	£1,218,248
King Lear (Simon Russell Beale NT play)	2014	£1,171,734
The Merchant of Venice (Pacino film)	2004	£1,115,620
Hamlet (Mel Gibson film)	1991	£1,036,186
Othello (Adrian Lester NT play)	2013	£948,313

*** gross after 17 days of release **gross after four days**

SHARP SHOOTERS

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

The quality that comes with shooting on film is undeniable, but for all the celluloid evangelism, digital is still a saviour for many

By Ben Roberts

Remember the Fisher-Price® PixelVision? It was a late-80s black-and-white 'toy' video-camera which, for a moment, promised to put affordable filmmaking into the hands of everyone, but the quality was pretty useless and it never gained much ground outside artists and experimental filmmakers. (This is sort of a sequel to my piece last month on John Waters, who apparently once judged a competition for porn films made on PixelVision cameras.)

Now the most popular camera in the world is on our phone, and we're all carrying HD digital video kit in our pocket without even realising its full potential.

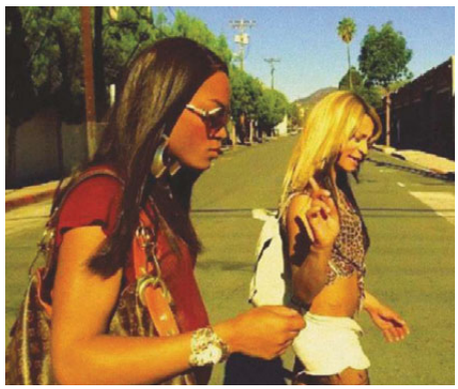
The digital revolution has been fast. Around the turn of the century, George Lucas and Robert Rodriguez (who famously shot his first film *El Mariachi* for peanuts on 16mm) began pushing digital filmmaking into the mainstream using early Sony HD cameras, and today most studio and many bigger independent films are shot digitally. Even Mike Leigh and Dick Pope converted for *Mr. Turner*, using the Arri ALEXA.

Meanwhile, there's been a wholesale conversion of cinema projection to digital, and the costs are still being recouped. The UK Film Council and the Arts Council invested £12 million of Lottery money in a Digital Screen Network of 240 UK cinema screens, to create better access for smaller films that couldn't afford to run on large numbers of 35mm prints. 35mm projection is now all but extinct in UK multiplexes, but survives in 40 or so independent cinemas, including the Picturehouse chain, the BFI, and a number of other subsidised venues; HOME in Manchester has a 35mm projector in its largest screen.

During the London Film Festival I heard a talk by Christopher Nolan, who believes that – in the rush of digital revolution – celluloid film has hit a crisis. Nolan is brilliantly evangelical about the manipulation of celluloid as art, and insists that his features are presented – and stored – on film, so that audiences can appreciate the true intent.

I liked the suggestion by the editor Walter Murch, also present, that an empty room shot on film makes an audience expect someone to enter, while the same room shot on video feels like someone has just left. He can't explain it, it's just a feeling, but he's right – probably due in part to the effect of a projector's shutter, and a blinking eye, on the brain (digital projectors have no shutter).

For aspiring filmmakers, or those stuck without funds, I can't recommend Sean Baker's low-budget 'Tangerine' enough



LA stories: *Tangerine*

Of course, Nolan's success has given him privileged leverage with the studios, but the truth is that many filmmakers, including those at the start of their career, still prefer to shoot on film.

Among filmmakers we've recently supported, Sarah Gavron, Andrew Haigh, Ben Rivers, Daniel Wolfe, Yann Demange, Andrea Arnold, Esther May Campbell, Ken Loach, Stephen Frears and Terence Davies shoot some or all of their films on 16mm, 35mm and even 70mm. The director of photography Robbie Ryan links many of these.

When I was a sales agent, the film (as opposed to digital) elements on a delivery schedule of materials were increasingly considered surplus to requirements and rubbed out, to save on costs. The permanence of digital storage is still something of an unknown, whereas film can have a lifespan of around 250 years; the delivery of film materials – particularly for films shot on film – is something we need to take seriously or risk obsolescence. Filmmakers would do well to read the BFI's 'Collection Policy' on collecting and protecting films.

But for all the evangelism around film, digital is still a saviour for the many.

Another filmmaker at the festival cast digital in a different light. We invited Sean Baker to talk to a group of BFI NET.WORK filmmakers about his fifth feature, *Tangerine* (see page 36) which he shot entirely on an iPhone 5s.

He said he had never wanted to make another low-budget film, but when he couldn't raise a larger budget for a different project he shot *Tangerine* with the iPhone, and the film is undeniably different – and better – for it. That's not least because his lead actors were trans women, cast on the streets where they worked, and their performances are authentic, funny, natural – more comfortable in the company of a phone than an Arri.

For aspiring filmmakers, or those stuck without funds, I can't recommend *Tangerine* enough. I promised Sean we wouldn't talk about his budget, but it was *low* low, and within any enterprising filmmaker's reach.

That phone in our pockets has given talented, under-funded filmmakers a real camera, and for films like *Tangerine*, which approach the world from outside the perceived mainstream, it's heaven-sent.

Ben Roberts is director of the BFI Film Fund. @bfiben

IN PRODUCTION

- **Katell Quillévéré, the French director of *Love Like Poison* and *Suzanne*, is currently shooting her third feature, *Réparer les vivants* ('Mend the Living'). The film is an adaptation of a novel by Maylis de Kerangal, and boasts a top-notch cast including Tahar Rahim, Anne Dorval and Emmanuelle Seigner.**
- **Amma Asante has started shooting a feature entitled *A United Kingdom* – the story of Seretse Khama, first president of Botswana, who before he took the role caused outrage by marrying a white woman. Production is taking place in Botswana and in the UK. David Oyelowo, Rosamund Pike and Jack Davenport star.**
- **Albert Serra has completed shooting his follow-up to *Story of My Death*: Jean-Pierre Léaud plays the title role in *Last Days of Louis XIV*, which focuses on the Sun King's final, bedridden days in Versailles as he prepares for his succession.**
- **Raoul Peck, whose earlier films play in a retrospective at BFI Southbank in December, has just finished shooting his next feature, *The Young Karl Marx*. The film, which the Haitian director co-wrote with Pascal Bonitzer, is set between 1844-48, and chronicles Marx's exile in Paris and his first meeting with Engels.**
- **Olivier Assayas has reunited with Kristen Stewart, who starred in the French director's recent *Clouds of Sils Maria*, for *Personal Shopper* – somewhat mysteriously described as "a ghost story set on the fringes of the fashion world". Stewart stars as a personal shopper to the stars who has psychic powers. Shooting is underway in Paris.**
- **Joe Dante's next feature sounds like a perfect fit. Entitled *Labirintus*, the film is a supernatural horror-thriller about a paranormal investigator and a psychiatric researcher who explore an abandoned Soviet research facility hidden deep in the maze-like catacombs beneath Hungary's Buda Castle. The film will be Dante's first feature since 2009's 3D *The Hole*, the director having spent much of his time since working on TV shows such as *Hawaii Five-O* and *Splatter*.**
- **Gurinder Chadha (below) is now shooting her next feature *Viceroy's House*. Set in 1947, on the eve of Indian independence from British colonial rule, the film stars Hugh Bonneville as Lord Mountbatten and Gillian Anderson as his wife, alongside Manish Dayal and Huma Qureshi.**

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TODD HAYNES

From his Jean Genet-inspired feature debut *Poison* in 1991 to his new Patricia Highsmith adaptation, the lesbian love story *Carol*, Todd Haynes has embraced stories that explore the complexity of sexual and identity politics. Here he explains what it feels like to become part of the cinematic canon, why naturalism in film is an artificial construct, what spanking means in his movies and why capitalism has won. **Interview by Ryan Gilbey**

For a director who is so original, there is a certain predictability to Todd Haynes. We know by now that he doesn't make movies set in the present. Even *Safe* (1994), seemingly his most modern film, takes place eight years before it was made and treats the 1980s as a distinct historical era. (His 2013 episode of the acerbic, unjustly curtailed HBO series *Enlightened*, starring Laura Dern, is the sole exception to this rule.) We can expect also that form in his work will be dictated by gender. Each of his movies about women – the clinical *Safe*, the voluptuous *Far from Heaven* (2002) and the visually tidy, muted HBO miniseries *Mildred Pierce* (2011) – is stylistically homogeneous. His new picture, *Carol*, about a romance in early 1950s New York between a married mother, Carol (Cate Blanchett), and a female department store assistant, Therese (Rooney Mara), conforms to this. To extend the patterning even further, Carol herself is the latest Haynes heroine with a hard consonant at the start of her name, after Karen in his featurette *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* (1987) – which uses Barbie dolls to dramatise the singer's life – as well as an earlier Carol in *Safe* and Cathy in *Far from Heaven*.

When Haynes takes men as his subject, the surface becomes unstable and the films break up into busy-bee collages of conflicting genres, tones and textures. It's evident in his feature debut *Poison* (1991), a portmanteau loosely inspired by Jean Genet about social panic and transgression; in *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), a glam-rock *Citizen Kane*; and *I'm Not There* (2007), a fragmented Bob Dylan biopic in which the subject is played by six actors, the words 'Bob Dylan' are never spoken and there are no characters who go by that name.

In a 2003 interview, his regular collaborator Julianne Moore rejected this binary approach to Haynes's cinema: "I just feel people want to sort of go, 'Oh, so these are the girl films, and these are the gay films. This one has a little gay in it and this one has a little girl in it.'" She's right: the truth is more complex. For all that *I'm Not There* is about a man, its strongest figures are female – not only Cate Blanchett as the insect-like electric-era iteration of Dylan, but also Charlotte Gainsbourg as the neglected wife of an actor cast in a film-within-the-film. Despite having no gay characters, the picture is as queer as they come, insisting upon that transience of identity intrinsic to the early 1990s New Queer Cinema of which Haynes was one of the figureheads.

The director once said that all his films lie in some way. But *Carol* tells the truth; it's his most straight-arrow film yet. Adapted by Phyllis Nagy from Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Price of Salt*, it situates its gay romance firmly in the social context of post-war America while obeying the natural rhythm of any love story. When I met Haynes in London recently, he brought with him one of the look-books he compiles during the preparation for each of his movies. He placed it on the coffee table between us and invited me to flick through it. Inside were hundreds of photographs of post-war New York from which he and his crew (including director of photography Ed Lachman, production designer Judy Becker and costume designer Sandy Powell) took inspiration for the images in *Carol* of women trapped behind fogged or rain-streaked glass. "It's full of all this Saul Leiter photography," he explained, "and that kind of soiled colour palette, that uncertain temperature." Over the course of an hour, he joined me in taking the uncertain temperature of his own work to date.

Rooney Mara and Cate Blanchett in *Carol*

Ryan Gilbey: You've been very open about stealing that *Brief Encounter* device at the beginning of *Carol*, where the main couple are spotted in public by a minor character.

Todd Haynes: Oh yeah. I'm always open about everything I steal.

RG: Why was it important that it's a man who leads us into this female story?

TH: Because it makes the discovery that it's a film about a woman, and which woman, all the more of an unexpected turn. So it poises you for the fact that we are going to be going somewhere we don't usually go and that even this will change, because it's set up as Therese's story and then ultimately it shifts by the time we come back to the scene. *Brief Encounter* came to mind when I read the script. The book and the first draft were completely linear, but what they made me think about – and this became a continued series of questions for me – is point of view. I feel like the love story in *Carol* can be distinguished from the classic domestic melodrama that we associate with Douglas Sirk by issues of point of view. Identification is not really the way Sirkian melodramas function; we're thrust outside of any privileged character's experience and we're watching the social forces exerting themselves.

RG: We're the gods looking down.

TH: Yes, and that's slightly Brechtian. There's an element in which you're watching social conditions play out and it's up to you to take a critique out of it and apply it to your own life. It was one of the many things Fassbinder took from Sirk. But *Carol* is really different and I loved it because it wasn't something I'd particularly done before. I also loved how

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID JOHNSON/CORBIS OUTLINE

radically Highsmith expresses that point of view of the lover in this sort of tunnel of love – how it cuts you off from society, from culture. It's reminiscent of the criminal subjects in her crime novels. All of a sudden this line is drawn between criminality and love. And this love is criminal in many ways, or is outside law and outside representation, though you don't even get to that until later in the story. At the very beginning it's simply that there's no syntax for Therese, for how to even speak of what's happening – there's no language for it.

RG: Carol says Therese seems to have been flung from space.

TH: Absolutely. There's literally a line in the book, "It would be almost like love, what she felt for Carol, except that Carol was a woman." There's no way that these terms can cohabit. Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse* speaks to this so beautifully and it was something I would look back on for underscoring little moments to show how you're in this realm of over-determined reading of every signal. When you're in love, you're reading every sign, every gesture.

RG: Lovers are the best students ever.

TH: Exactly. Everything is something to decode. The thing is that you never really get the answer. You're set up to never really find. You're in that "image-repertoire", as he calls it, where you're just going from sign to sign, hungry for the truth. Barthes says every man who searches for the truth is destined never to find it, so you're in this perpetual state of reading. And there's a dramatising of everything that's so powerfully evoked in the book. I love that. It suggests an innate gulf between subject and object. That was something we thought about in how we visualised the movie.

RG: I was aware throughout that I was watching and looking – you're constantly shooting through doorways and glass and traffic. But do you think the emotional heft of the story removes that distance that we sometimes have in your films? It feels like your most plainly immersive story.

TH: When you're foregrounding the acts of looking, it only excites the need to see. And it ultimately just foregrounds the original looker.

RG: You don't need to bring out the emotion because it bubbles out anyway, doesn't it?

TH: It's suppressed and it's all about these levels of constraint. All love stories require it. They require boundaries, limits that separate the lovers from being able to get to each other, and that's why the love story becomes a less viable genre as we move toward a, hopefully, more permissive society where it's harder to imagine why two people couldn't get together in the West. It's why *Brokeback Mountain* was such a revelation. Let's put this love in the most unlikely place between the most unlikely subjects and all of a sudden it was like, "Oh my god. It's too unbearably painful." You need to be left yearning for something that can't quite work.

RG: Is it significant that *Carol* is coming out now? With equal marriage suddenly being a reality, is the film saying: "Don't forget how we got here"?

TH: It really wasn't my primary motivation. That somewhat superior position of pointing out that things are so much better now doesn't really interest me creatively. It's more that the hidden corridors and secret modes that minorities and subcultures had to create to survive are really interesting, and we've lost those. That's part of that excitement of the idea that you're inventing this language for this love. In a way that's how everybody who falls in love feels – like they're inventing it themselves, but in this case there really wasn't a language. There was even less a language or a depiction of lesbian love than there was of gay love. There's that moment almost of panic where Therese sees the butch/femme couple in the record store checking her out and she thinks: "That's not me." It's like she's not ready to be named. She wants to remain in the unspoken, the unnamed.

RG: You refer to this in *Poison* – the horror of being given a name.

TH: When Genet was named a criminal, it incited a kind of vengefulness: "If you're gonna name me that, I'm gonna redouble that." And for all the amazing and essential movements we've made toward tolerance toward gay and lesbian lives, which I support wholeheartedly, I also recognise that it's foreign to the person who made *Poison* in the early 1990s, who was surrounded by this intolerant Aids era, and for whom the clear disclosure of how much homosexuality threatened the status quo also armed us with the critique of dominant culture that I learned so much from. I felt I could direct it back as a weapon. All of the places where we used to want to stand outside society seem to be going away. Young people have very little sense of suspicion about corporate society, about branding – in fact, they want to become spokespeople for products and stuff. There's less value attributed to this idea of standing outside a capitalist society, a market-driven society. We brand ourselves, we monetise our worth on social media with our likes and our popularity quotas and all those things. Capitalism has won and, within it, gay rights are part of that. When all those businesses opposed the anti-gay legislation or the religious freedom legislation that was being proposed in the United States, it was like even tolerance and acceptance and progress had acquired a commercial value.

Today there's less value attributed to this idea of standing outside a capitalist society. We brand ourselves, we monetise our worth

RG: Is it important for you as an artist as well as a person to have that to fight against? Gus Van Sant said he thought he'd made better films under a more hostile administration.

TH: Yes, sure. That's what made that unique time that formed me as a filmmaker in ways I could never have anticipated and put me in the company of people like Gus, and we were branded with the New Queer Cinema mantle. But I didn't feel like that was superficial, because we were defining an urgency and, yes, a necessity to take a stand that is less the case now. Maybe the commercial usefulness of gay and lesbian consumers in our world helps explain why racial issues are still so unresolved. They keep coming back because they follow a different economic narrative. They reflect a different economic sector of the society that really isn't protected by the sort of consumer and capitalist model.

RG: You mean there isn't, say, a defined black or Hispanic dollar in the way that there is a pink one?

TH: Yeah, it doesn't get so mixed up into middle-class values, and we've lost middle-class, anyway. It's sort of like a wealthy class and a working class or a non-working working class.

RG: What would be a preferable outcome? Because it's not as simple as saying, "You kids don't know what it was like in the 80s and 90s!"

TH: Well, I do think corporate life is just too integrated into every aspect of our lives, that our iPhones mean more than they should. I'm sorry if I sound old-fashioned but I do think it's changing the way we relate to each other as human beings, the way we communicate, because it's so easy to be distracted. And I'm as much of a victim of it as anybody. I don't like how it's affected my own creative process. It's changed the way I

Heart of the matter: Blanchett's Carol with her daughter Rindy, played by K.K. Heim

write and think and immerse. I can't even turn off the shuffle mode because it's so addictive [*laughs*]. It means I don't delve more deeply into a musical experience and the continuity of a full album because of the fun and the surprise. You feel like it's taking your temperature. "Wow, that was a great segue!" – that kind of thing.

RG: Did this sense of what we've lost contribute to your decision to shoot *Carol* on Super 16 film?

TH: It's all built into it. The speed of film stocks and the speed of lenses today are so sophisticated, the grain content has basically vanished. This first occurred to me when I was going to do *Mildred Pierce* and we knew it would be broadcast on HBO and then when you see 35mm film on HDTV, it looks like digital cinematography. You don't see the grain; it goes away. So Ed [Lachman] and I were like, "Oh, let's degrade and let's force that grain back into it." And it worked. Film has dust and grain and imperfections that give it character, just like human beings do. It's stinky.

RG: There's a romanticism about performances like the one Cate Blanchett gives in *Carol*. We like to think they just emerge fully formed on screen, but she must've had her own doubts.

TH: Of course. My own terror, my own way of stripping myself down each time as if I've never done it before – I have seen that reflected back at me from people that I never think would experience that vulnerability or that uncertainty. And Cate is like that and she's hardest on herself on set, but she's also an incredibly kind and generous person. Maybe that's a way of tamping down the nerves and the feeling of taking risks and not knowing that you're there yet. I think I do that, as opposed to some directors whose tensions get shouted out at times. I suck that in. But she's attentive to every aspect of the process. She doesn't demand it, but she so appreciates me sharing in what the visual language is and what the visual representations are.

RG: Julianne Moore has talked about it being helpful knowing where she was going to be in the frame in *Safe*.

TH: Totally. It's remarkable. Most of the actors I work with understand the frame to a degree that would surprise viewers.

RG: How do you tutor your actors in the very specific acting styles in each of your films?

TH: *Far from Heaven* is the clearest example where there's a language that's built into the narrative style and into the dialogue, and in that case I would show all the actors Sirk films because we really were honouring this expressionistic, melodramatic, heightened style. It's probably true for most of my films up to these that are based on and loyal to novels – *The Price of Salt* for *Carol*, and *Mildred Pierce*. It's funny, I almost feel like it's taken my entire career to come to naturalism, to still see it as a kind of artificial language that's constructed, that positions you with certain conventions, but in some sense is less aggressive in ways that it might force the viewer outside of the emotional experience of the film. Or at least it's less of a roundabout route that you have to take back to the emotion.

RG: On each of the three previous occasions we've met, you've had stories about what hell it was to make whichever film we were discussing. You said about *I'm Not There* that you'd never come closer to wishing a film would collapse because it was so hard to make.

Kate Winslet in *Mildred Pierce* (2011)

TH: God, what a drama queen!

RG: Do you have the same tale to tell with *Carol*?

TH: It was hard, but maybe a little less so. People have asked me if it's really different to work from your own script than from someone else's – and this is really the first time I've done that on screen – and my first thought is it's comparable because you have to discard all the time. You have to let go of each prior stage in the process of making the movie and really look hard at what's in front of you because it's always different from what you imagine. It's different from what's described on the page, your dailies, your first cut is different from each stage, and you have to be open to hating it and bearing down quite hard on it and giving up your attachments to things. It's a moving train. Nobody can control every aspect of the film. Once you cut it and show it to an audience, it's new again and it's working in a different way than you can control. It's something where you have to listen to what's right in front of you.

RG: Do you mean that not having lived with this for years, as you did with *Velvet Goldmine* or *I'm Not There*, liberated you?

TH: With those films that I develop over such a long period of time, there's a rootedness in me that's probably a little different. *Carol* came fairly quickly to me – I got the script in May 2013, and by the following January we were in pre-production in Cincinnati. So usually the long gestation period of writing and research and financing, which I love because it also gets me in quite deep... maybe that lightened the load in some way on set. But also *Velvet Goldmine* and *I'm Not There* are so wildly ambitious formally, stylistically, and in what I needed to shoot. Here, at least, we're in the same language stylistically throughout. It has a linear integrity; all of those things are intact, and the love story has a shape that I think we could all feel together, even though you're shooting out of order and you're under strain and duress and all that.

RG: So that period of trying to do a lot with not enough money isn't over for you?

TH: No, not at all. No, no, no. We did not have enough money on *Carol*. In fact, the bond company started to patrol the production in the last three weeks of the film. They didn't take it out of my hands – I mean, they intervened most aggressively on *Far from Heaven* toward the end when we were over budget – but it's always been a very difficult relationship with the bond company on all these films except on *Mildred Pierce*.

RG: You've been making films for nearly 30 years. You must feel like that part of it has to come to an end.

TH: Oh, I know. But then I just remember reading the same exact story coming from Robert Altman and you just go, "What?" This is one of my idols, with this unquestioned value and worth and you're, like, "Fuck, man, it's the same." A lot of it has to do with changes in viewership. People don't go to the cinema to see dramatic films the way they used to, and there just aren't the same resources that there are in cable, and suddenly there's this healthy competitive landscape where everyone in TV wants to outdo the other in creating dark ambiguous characters and storylines.

RG: So there's a freedom in television that there isn't in cinema?

TH: In terms of dramatic subjects, yes, absolutely.

RG: Seeing as I've dwelt on how hellish filmmaking has been for you, tell me what kind of improvements there were on *Mildred Pierce*.

TH: The difference was just feeling that there was a solid foundation

Christmas *Carol*: Mara as Therese, a department store assistant in 1950s New York

underneath. This is like a real budget from a studio, not an indie thing, which is still sort of the model in many ways for how my producer Christine [Vachon] and I work. Once we got green-lit and they approved the budget, then all of a sudden I felt secure. As we got deeper into it, that only solidified.

RG: And you didn't miss the fight?

TH: No, I did not [*laughs*]. It was really hard because it was shooting more pages a day than I ever had before. You really have to shoot five pages a day for television. That was daunting. Some days we did seven pages in a day. I mean, really crazy speed working with two cameras, really planning it intelligently to maintain the visual and stylistic integrities. Also, all of us on *Mildred Pierce* were from movies. None of us were from TV before: Ed [Lachman], Kate [Winslet], me, and I loved that.

RG: But it says "A film by" at the beginning. That was important?

TH: Yes.

RG: You've also said that you like the fact that people might have been flicking through channels or have come to the programme because of Kate. Why did that appeal to you?

TH: I was very aware of and interested in it being the opportunity to entertain a different audience and draw them into this material and have the material really speak in a more direct language, a more accessible language, to what was happening in our lives right now, right then – that post-recession America and how relevant and applicable it was to what was happening. I don't know if it changed the world, but I think more people saw that movie – "that movie" [*laughs*] – than anything I had done before.

RG: Do you think generally about how your films are seen? It's interesting now to watch *Superstar* on YouTube, whereas it could only previously be seen by borrowing a scratchy VHS from a friend of a friend.

TH: Well, hopefully *Superstar* always maintains some element of the illicit. But I guess we might be looking at a slightly broader audience for *Carol* than anything I've done on film before, and of course I'm incredibly proud of it. It's still a quiet slow-burn experience despite all the hype. This is a film that Harvey [Weinstein] is distributing. This is the third of mine he's done, but I think it's the first that he feels he knows what to do with in terms of marketing. But it's still a unique experience and it's not going to take you by the neck and strangle you into feeling something. You really have to have some patience for it.

RG: As with Kate Winslet in *Mildred Pierce*, you'll have fans of Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara coming to see this who might not have bothered with a lesbian love story.

TH: It makes it kind of irresistible. And in that regard the cultural moment it's falling into adds relevance, adds a sort of platform for it, which is all good. All those changes I was speaking about – I don't mean to understate how important they are, and for every kid coming out today there's a very different world they can look at.

RG: 'Queer' as an idea is understood more now than it was even during the New Queer Cinema years.

TH: But people don't really use the word, do they?

Safe (1994)

Poison (1991)

RG: Well, it was a surprise to me that they do. I know someone in his twenties who came out as queer rather than gay.

TH: That's great. It's so cool that there's that mutability.

RG: Don't you think in some sense queer has won, because we understand what it means now?

TH: Well, I love hearing *those* examples [*laughs*]. I do think the easier language for legislative agendas is this 'born that way' biologically determined idea of sexual orientation, and that's what also fits more neatly into trans issues, where there's a sort of essential idea of gender, an essential idea of sexual desire – that we just have to find and embrace and then marry and have kids and blah-blah-blah. And that isn't queer to me. What interested me so much about the glam era in the early 1970s was that whole vernacular of radical instability around identity and sexual identity. It was fluid. Androgyny was the model. That is unnerving to straights and gays alike and it's easy for the straight world to accept the gay world when everybody is in their solid essential identities. "You just stay over there [*laughs*] and I love you for your innate difference to me that will never change." But sexuality, just the stuff of being human, is not clean and tidy and there's this fear of the word 'choice', which is something that conservatives use or that the Left use against conservatives – that we've *chosen* the lifestyle. The Left wanna say, or gay communities wanna say, "No, there was no choice in the matter."

Sometimes, in following classic narrative form you can be both fundamentally popular and transgressive at the same time

RG: But you're saying, "What about if there was choice?" Why is that a problem?

TH: Exactly. Why is that wrong? Don't we all make choices anyway? We choose to marry this person; we choose to make a commitment to that person. If you're bisexual you're usually seeing one person at a time; that's a choice you're making, even if you still define your sexual desire as broad. It's interesting when you see the polls that say everyone under 20 today believes in fluid sexuality and that diminishes generationally as you get older. And it's like, "Well, yeah, because you're in your twenties. You haven't had to make a choice. You haven't married somebody and had kids with them."

RG: Let's see what they're like when they're 40.

TH: Precisely. Choice has a bearing in our attitudes and our opinions and we defend our choices, even if desire sometimes butts up against them. There should be a place where we can talk about that and not have it creep everybody out.

RG: Sure. And a film can be queer but not necessarily gay and vice versa. *Safe* being a good example, where queer is about

Fine art: Julianne Moore and Dennis Haysbert in *Far from Heaven* (2002)

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (5)

perspective. *Poison* and *Safe* were ahead of their time in that respect, but one of the disadvantages is that *Safe*, especially, wasn't understood. How has it felt to see the slow dawning of understanding about that film?
TH: I feel that way about all of my films. *Safe* might be a more extreme case, but they've all found their following. There's always a coterie of girls who come up to me – I can just see them coming, it's like, "Here comes the *Velvet Goldmine* crowd" *[laughs]*. The films have found some place in film studies or feminist studies and they're good teaching tools. A lot of the teachers like them because they're full of references or Freud.
RG: It's like that line Michael Stipe wrote in the introduction to the *Velvet Goldmine* screenplay when it was published – that it's a film that teaches you how it wants to be watched.
TH: Oh yeah, that's so nice. I forgot that.
RG: That notorious Todd McCarthy review of *Safe* in *Variety* is often mentioned and it's just staggering to read now. The gist of his objection is: "I expected an ironic twist and it didn't come. This film isn't what I wanted it to be." When that review came out, did you think it was possible that this film might simply not be understood?
TH: Oh, for sure. I've always been able to generate a certain energy or pride or retaliatory something-or-other from feeling purposefully in the margins: that this is where I stand. Sort of like the Genet thing, that double downing. And knowing that films I love and films that have affected me weren't always immediately received by critics or audiences. That said, there is a sense – and the closest I've come is with *Far from Heaven* – where sometimes in following classic narrative form you can be both fundamentally popular and transgressive at the same time. You can critique the status quo and undermine the sense of comfort in the viewer in a way that is exciting and immediately gratifying but which remains radical. That's true for Hitchcock. And I felt I did that with *Far from Heaven*, by humbling myself to a classic genre and treating it with as much sincerity and respect as I could, but keeping all of those innate, critical components built into it. It was comprehensible in the simplest, purest, most distilled way and that's not something I do very often.
RG: I've noticed that children play a key role in your storytelling. There are always child witnesses to whatever's going on. Sometimes children are torchbearers, as in *I'm Not There* and *Velvet Goldmine*. But they're always there.
TH: That's so cool you say that because my next movie is about kids and more for kids than anything I've done. It's called *Wonderstruck* [based on the novel by Brian Selznick]. It's ideally a film for kids and their parents; it's carried by three 12-year-olds and I think it should really communicate directly to that age group. That's what I want. But yeah, what's so funny is how there are kids in some of my films, like the little boy in *Poison* who stands as this emblem of this almost religious perversity, like a classic Genet image of the innately perverse but transcendent figure. And then there are kids like the ones in Sirk movies, who are these horrible creatures who embody the status quo in miniature, grotesque forms that critique the world around them.

I'm Not There (2007)

Velvet Goldmine (1998)

RG: Stevie in your short film *Dottie Gets Spanked* [1993] seems like the ultimate character of yours. He's receiving so much stimuli and is expected to cope with it all.
TH: Right. And, as the kids in *Wonderstruck* do, he finds coping mechanisms for the contradictions of life and experience through creative practice and dreaming. Stevie also learns how to manage life through repression in the most conscious way, saving the illicit, transgressive expression when he wraps his drawing in foil at the end of the film, but knowing that it's protected, it's still there, it's buried – just the act of burying is interesting because we all do it. It's a way of surviving.
RG: Stevie's father is angry at him for his interest in the feminine. And you told me your own father promised you a new pad when you were a child if you stopped drawing princesses. Are there other ways in which *Dottie Gets Spanked* revisits your childhood?
TH: I don't know if it's over-extrapolating from it, but like *Mary Poppins* [1964] being the first film I saw and how cinema and the maternal were kind of fused at the very beginning in this powerful, fantastic, visual, kinesthetic experience of the movies, with that really strong, somewhat punishing maternal figure.
RG: Well, spanking comes up a lot as well in your films.
TH: Yeah, you're probably, like, "What's his problem with the spanking business?" Although, I think I've gotten it out of my system; it hasn't come up in quite a while. Oh no, wait, it's in *Mildred Pierce*!
RG: There's a big old spanking in *Mildred Pierce*. What does spanking represent in your films?
TH: Well, it represents different things in different films. 'A Child Is Being Beaten' is this endlessly illuminating essay by Freud – it first became kind of a metaphor for anorexic behaviour because, again, it creates a tableau infused with spectatorial and sadistic pleasure. The subjects are little girls in Freud's account of them watching beatings of little boys in the schoolyard with a kind of excitement. What I kept hearing when we were doing research on anorexia for *Superstar* was that there was this mastery over the sadistic and the masochistic spectrum of the imagination in controlling the body and controlling desire. It's used in *Superstar* in the one place in the movie where you see a hand making a doll spank another doll, so there's a puppetmaster; there's somebody controlling the narrative. Spanking is the ultimate directorial space *[laughs]*. It's a family theatrical event. There's always somebody watching it happen. There's a witness. Even when it's maybe just you and your father's spanking you, there's something about it where you feel you can see it from the outside. I was spanked two or three times by my dad when I was a kid, but it was against our family beliefs.
RG: That's pretty progressive for the time, to not believe in spanking.
TH: It was. That came from my mum, which is usually the source of behavioural and moral dictates within a family. And definitely someone who connects family practices to class identification – you know, we're *these* kinds of people and so we behave like *this*. That was true with my mum, for whom spanking was not practised. My dad came from a family where it was and so he lost his temper and transgressed. I felt this and it's in *Poison*. It's very much of a kind of mother-son recognition when the little boy's being spanked in that scene and the mother is watching and you zoom into the mother. Maybe there's also a sense of identification between little boy and mother that's being contextualised or fused in this moment of victimisation. Clearly – and it's in the Freud article – there's a desire to be spanked that's at the root of all of this.
RG: You've mentioned Fassbinder, Hitchcock and Sirk. When did you realise that 'Haynes' had become a name cited in that way? How does it feel to know your name is part of the canon?
TH: Man, those are still completely out-of-body experiences. Looking at a Bowie biography and finding my name in the index. And Dylan biographies where I'm part of the official history. Or Fassbinder and Sirk. It's not something I can make cohesive. It's surreal and humbling. But just to feel like I play a part in making that tradition, that discussion, that inheritance available to kids in America in film class – that's a source of tremendous pride. That's the closest I can get to ownership of it.
RG: Did Dylan ever get in touch about *I'm Not There*?
TH: Not in touch, but I know he liked the movie. And he talks about it in the first major interview he did after *I'm Not There* came out, which was a couple of years later, praising Cate's performance. He was discussing his own film, *Masked and Anonymous* [2003], and he was, like: "I think it's an interesting film still. I don't know why I'm in the middle of it. That makes no sense. Now if Cate Blanchett had played me..." I think he respected the integrity and I think he admires it as a work of art. What more could I possibly ask for? That's awesome.

***Carol* is released on 27 November and is reviewed on page 69**

THE POET OF APPREHENSION

From the outset, the detached, clinical insights offered in Patricia Highsmith's unsettling novels have proved attractive to filmmakers

By Philip Kemp

Few tyro authors can have enjoyed such an auspicious start to having their work adapted for the screen. In 1950, after several years of writing for comic-book publishers, the 29-year-old Patricia Highsmith succeeded in getting her first novel published. Almost at once, the film rights were snapped up – for a modest $2,000 according to some accounts, though others say it was $7,500 – by no less a figure than Alfred Hitchcock.

Strangers on a Train (1951) – the movie preserved the title of the original – not only inaugurated Hitch's second great period after a run of flops (*The Paradine Case*, *Rope*, *Under Capricorn*, *Stage Fright*) but made Highsmith's reputation as a writer. Even so, she was less than happy about the film, though not because the rights had been sold so cheaply. ("That wasn't a bad price for a first book," she acknowledged.) As ever, Hitchcock didn't scruple to make radical changes to his material. What fascinated him was the 'exchange of murders' – the devious Bruno, meeting the more straight-up Guy on a train, proposes that each of them commits the other's murder, with Bruno disposing of Guy's importunate estranged wife while Guy kills Bruno's hated father. Everything else in the novel was up for grabs. Calling in Raymond Chandler as screenwriter – the two men, as it turned out, soon came to detest each other – Hitch presided over major changes to Highsmith's work.

The two lead characters, for a start, turned out rather differently. Guy, an architect in the novel, is in the film a tennis champion with political aspirations ("ludicrous", Highsmith commented), while Bruno, whom she portrays as a physically repugnant alcoholic, becomes one of Hitchcock's charming, plausible villains – though the film preserves the implication that he's gay. (Interestingly, a 1996 TV remake, *Once You Meet a Stranger*, had both main characters as female, played by Jacqueline Bisset and Theresa Russell.) And where the screen Guy reneges on his part of the bargain, in the book he does murder Bruno's father. Bruno dies, not in a struggle with Guy, but in a boating accident, with the guilt-ridden Guy trying to rescue him, and in the end Guy is trapped by a tireless detective.

Later in her career, Highsmith affected indifference over changes made to her novels for screen purposes. "Really, I don't mind too much if they take liberties with my plots, because they're trying to do something quite different from a book, and I think they have a right to change the story as much as they wish." At the time, it seems, she was less sanguine about what Hitch and his colleagues had done, even if the association with a hit movie did her career no harm.

But despite her new-found fame, Highsmith's second novel, *The Price of Salt*, was published in 1952 under the pseudonym Claire Morgan – not, she claimed, because of its subject matter, an account of a lesbian affair, but because, "I was already labelled as a mystery writer, even though *Strangers on a Train* was not a mystery, and I didn't want to be labelled as a gay writer". Partially inspired by the experiences of her ex-lover Virginia Kent Catherwood, *The Price of Salt* is unique among Highsmith's novels in reaching a relatively happy ending. (Which also made it unprecedented, come to that, among gay novels published up to that point.) Turned down by her previous publishers, Harper & Bros, it was accepted by Coward-McCann and sold around a million copies. Even so, it's taken more than 60 years to reach the screen, as Todd Haynes's *Carol*.

An early cover for *The Price of Salt*, *Carol's* source

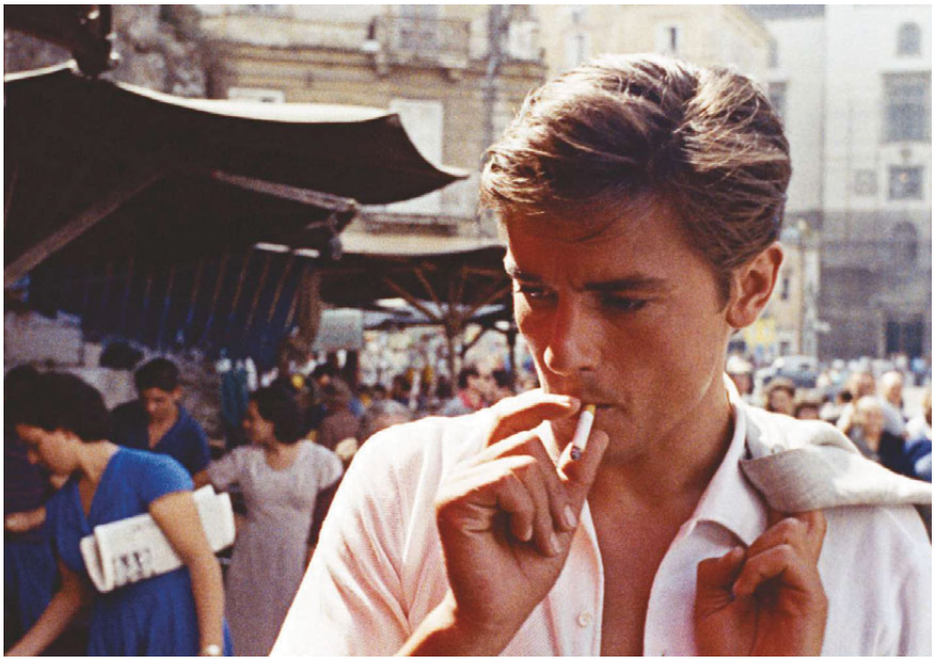
Highsmith was right about the mislabelling; she wasn't a mystery writer, and her novels aren't whodunits. In them, everything is clear enough; we're not misled, and we're never in much doubt what's going on. The fascination lies in watching it happen, and wondering just how far her protagonists will take it. Graham Greene, whom she admired, called her "the poet of apprehension rather than of fear", and Ruth Rendell, who owed her much, summed up her work as "the literature of psychosexual disturbance". She herself commented, "I've been writing the same thing since I was 15 years old – about people who are a little cracked. I saw a lot around me."

Psychosexually disturbed, or "a little cracked" – either might be said of Highsmith's most famous creation, the charming sociopath and killer Tom Ripley, though neither term comes near to summing up his complex, inscrutable character. Between 1955-91 she wrote five novels about him – and, *Strangers on a Train* apart, it's for the 'Ripliad' that she'll almost certainly be remembered. Not least because Ripley, urbane, cultivated, agreeable and terrifyingly devoid of scruples, has attracted numerous filmmakers.

Highsmith described Alain Delon as "my perfect Ripley". When he starred in René Clément's *Plein soleil* (*Purple Noon*, 1960), the first of the Ripley adaptations, Delon was 25, at the peak of his sleek, cool beauty, and in this his international breakthrough role he indeed seemed to embody the lethal charm and sexual ambiguity of Ripley to perfection. In his murder and subsequent impersonation of Philippe Greenleaf (Dickie Greenleaf in the novel) there's more than a hint of Wilde's "For each man kills the thing he loves" – although Highsmith always denied Ripley was gay. "He appreciates good looks in other men, that's true," she told Gerald Peary in a 1988 interview for *Sight & Sound*. "But he's married in later books. I'm not saying he's very strong in the sex department. But he makes it in bed with his wife." Elsewhere she's commented that "murderers have a warped sex-life".

Where *Plein soleil* went wrong, for Highsmith as for many reviewers, was in losing its nerve and, in deference to the prevailing censorship, having Ripley caught in the final reel. "A terrible

The look of love: Cate Blanchett in the title role of *Carol*



Psycho killer, qu'est-ce que c'est: Alain Delon, Highsmith's 'perfect Ripley', in *Plein soleil* (1960)

Matt Damon as *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999)

In critical estimation, screen adaptations of the Ripley novels tend to stand or fall by the portrayal of their anti-hero

concession to so-called public morality," she remarked. In remaking the story, this time under the novel's original title of *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), Anthony Minghella didn't commit the same mistake. What Highsmith would have made of Matt Damon's portrayal of Ripley we'll never know, as she died in 1995. For some reviewers his performance paled beside that of Delon, and indeed beside that of his co-star Jude Law as Dickie Greenleaf (or indeed of Philip Seymour Hoffman as Freddie Miles, Ripley's second victim). Others, though, thought more highly of Damon; Roger Ebert appreciated the way that, while bland as Ripley, he took on in his deceptions "the vivid coloration of others".

In critical estimation, screen adaptations of the Ripley novels tend to stand or fall by the portrayal of their anti-hero. In Wim Wenders's *The American Friend* (*Der amerikanische Freund*, 1978), taken from the third of the five novels, *Ripley's Game*, Dennis Hopper's performance divided opinion. For many – including, initially, Highsmith herself – Hopper was altogether too brash and overtly sinister to play the suave dissembler, as if Wenders were trying to deconstruct the character rather as Robert Altman set out to deconstruct Philip Marlowe in *The Long Goodbye* (1973). In 2002 Liliana Cavani remade the story, this time under its original title, with John Malkovich as Ripley. Again, responses differed: his quietly understated reading struck some as inert, but for Ebert he was "precisely the Ripley I imagine... Ripley has a psychopath's detachment from human values." The film wasn't given a US release.

Though Highsmith was American, her books have attracted remarkably few American directors; TV adaptations apart, Haynes is the first. She's enjoyed more currency among French filmmakers: her 1960 novel *This Sweet Sickness*, a study in romantic obsession taken to the point of madness, was adapted by Claude Miller as *Dites-lui que je l'aime* (1977), giving Gérard Depardieu one of his best early roles. *The Cry of the Owl*, which reworks a similar theme in a yet colder register, furnished Claude Chabrol with the basis for one of his lesser films, *Le Cri du hibou* (1987); and *Deep Water*, written in 1957 just after the first of the Ripley novels, became *Eaux profondes* (1981), directed by Michel Deville, with Jean-Louis Trintignant as a man whose marital jealousy gradually turns murderous. All three, while missing the last degree of tension, capture something of the single-minded fixation that fuels Highsmith's protagonists, driving them open-eyed towards disruption and death – other people's, usually.

The same could be said for two more recent British adaptations of her novels. Jamie Thraves's *The Cry of the Owl* (2008) draws on the same source as Chabrol's film, with Paddy Considine as the discontented loner who becomes obsessed with a seemingly happily married woman. *The Two Faces of January* (2013), directed by Hossein Amini from Highsmith's 1964 novel, pulls together several of her key elements: jealousy within a triangular relationship, stored-up guilt, resentment of a father figure, larceny and murder, against the setting of modern-day Greece. What attracted Amini to the story, he explained, was "the way that [Highsmith] puts us in the shoes of traditionally 'unlikeable' characters... and then makes us not only understand their motivations but recognise something of ourselves in them". Indifferent as always to conventional morality, Highsmith never condemns her characters, but observes them with a detached, clinical eye. The best film adaptations of her work do likewise. S

Stranger danger: Farley Granger and Robert Walker in *Strangers on a Train* (1951)

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

Steven Spielberg's true-life Cold War prisoner-swap drama 'Bridge of Spies' presents the US and Soviet bloc as mirror images of one another, a familiar idea from the classic spy thrillers it evokes but one that has rarely been treated to the degree of visual fluency the director gives it here

By Nick Pinkerton

Spoiler warning!

It's something of a truism in screen depictions of the Cold War that no one who isn't named James Bond can have had much fun participating in it. Films by wildly disparate talents, including Martin Ritt and John le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965), Michael Anderson and Harold Pinter's *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966) and John Huston's *The Mackintosh Man* (1973) are united by their affectlessness and a certain flatness of tone. (Even Hitchcock, always one for the glossy travelogue, had to drab things up a bit in 1966 for *Torn Curtain*.) This was to be a grey-flannel war, conducted in niggling negotiations and fine print, with an 'exotic' backdrop that resembled Martin Parr's *Boring Postcards* collection from pre-reunification Germany.

Steven Spielberg is constitutionally incapable of repressing certain of his expressionistic flourishes – blinding backlighting makes more than a few appearances in his latest, *Bridge of Spies* – but his film is still steeped in the screen history of the Cold War. Its climactic

THE LOOKING-GLASS WAR ***Bridge of Spies*** **follows the real-life efforts of US lawyer James B. Donovan (Tom Hanks) on a mission to Berlin to negotiate the release of U-2 spy plane pilot Francis Gary Powers in exchange for Soviet spy Rudolf Abel**

APPOINTMENT

IN BERLIN

scene of two simultaneous prisoner exchanges on the border between East and West Germany – one at Checkpoint Charlie and one at the Glienicke Bridge – recalls Ritt's classic, though this hand-off reaches a rather less pessimistic conclusion. The resurrected Tempelhof Airport, with its familiar neon sign and austere Reich architecture, may stir in some cinephiles the memory of Billy Wilder's spoof *One, Two, Three* (1961), in which Jimmy Cagney's Coca-Cola exec and his family get wrapped up in spy games between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic (Spielberg's production designer is frequent Wes Anderson collaborator Adam Stockhausen, who recently created the hideous Soviet-era look of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*.)

As in Wilder's film, the hero of *Bridge of Spies* comes from the private sector. He is James B. Donovan, an actual historical personage – as the opening titles are eager to tell us, in one of the most gruesomely overused phrases in modern movies, the goings-on that we will see depicted are "Inspired by true events". The actual Donovan, as in the movie, was an insurance lawyer living in Brooklyn who, prior to obtaining his partnership, had assisted Justice Robert H. Jackson at the 1945 Nuremberg trials. This was thought to qualify Donovan for the thankless job of acting as defence attorney for Rudolf Abel, a Soviet intelligence officer who'd been raised in Newcastle upon Tyne by Bolshevik émigré parents, and who had been caught by the FBI practising his craft in New York. (The 'Hollow Nickel Case', in which Abel was tripped up, is dramatised in the last chapter of Mervyn LeRoy/J. Edgar Hoover's 1959 film *The FBI Story*, starring James Stewart.) To the chagrin of many, Donovan proceeded to provide Abel with a more than merely symbolic defence, which kept him out of the electric chair, and the relationship between the men effectively led to Donovan being nominated for yet another delicate task – travelling to divided Berlin to broker the exchange of Abel for the pilot of an American U-2 spy plane, Francis Gary Powers, who wa s being held hostage by the Soviets after being shot down in their airspace.

Inspired by true events or no, Donovan is played by an honest-to-God movie star, Tom Hanks, who in the part manages at once to co-habit the earnest idealism of Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) and the good-natured, folksy, all-American, back-slapping front which disguises the shrewdness of a born strategist, also exemplified by the conception of the 16th president in Spielberg's *Lincoln* (2012). And *Bridge of Spies*, from a screenplay written by Matt Charman and polished by Joel and Ethan Coen, is an honest-to-God movie, fleet-footed and classically constructed, establishing immediately the visual patterns which it will self-assuredly toy with throughout, creating subtle registers of meaning as it does so, as well as its comedy of verbal brinksmanship. The Coens' previous bleakly cynical effort in the cloak-and-dagger genre, *Burn After Reading* (2008), suggests that their version of American history would jibe not at all with the Spielbergian vision, but the collaboration seems to have acted as a tonic, not toning down his optimism, but providing a crucible to test it in.

Donovan is introduced in the process of laying down a line of bullshit, which is to say that he is introduced practising law. "Don't say 'my guy'. He's not my guy," are the first words we hear him speak, one of those pieces of linguistic finessing which the legal profession excels in. (Recall the defining statement of the first Clinton presidency: "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is.") The 'guy' who Donovan is disavowing ownership of is insured by his client, and has been involved in an accident with a pack of motorcyclists. This, he argues, building a seemingly inviolable bulwark of metaphor, must be considered a single accident rather than a series of accidents. That later this same lawyer who is trying to save his client a few shekels of payoff to (presumably) injured motorcyclists will be heard not once but twice to say, "Every person matters," a kind of moral mantra, is a piquant irony that the Coens cannot have been unaware of, though it's here not to show up Donovan or the capitalist free society which he serves for their hypocrisy, but to establish that he is awfully good at what he does.

While this palaver establishes the basic pattern of dialogue in *Bridge of Spies* – a film concerned with the process of arbitration and compromise – the set piece which precedes it lays down the film's organising visual motif. We first see Rudolf Abel (Mark Rylance, who plays the part with a still-as-the-grave deadpan demeanour), poised between two 'reflections' – one of his face in the mirror, the other the canvas he has filled with his own portrait. Here we have a suggestion of the bifurcated structure of the film to come, which counterpoises the images of two superpowers and the prisoners taken in their ideological clash. The fact that Spielberg introduces a Soviet spy with a composition that's borrowed from the 1960 *Triple Self-Portrait* of Norman Rockwell, an artist to whom he has sometimes been compared because of his commercial appeal and perceived uncritical attitude towards mom-

THE SPYING GAME
In *Bridge of Spies*, Hanks and Spielberg (opposite) tap into the screen history of the Cold War, recalling films such as Martin Ritt's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965, right) and even elements of Billy Wilder's spoof *One, Two, Three* (1961, far right)

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

'Bridge of Spies' has a clear connection to the moral universes of 'Schindler's List' and 'Saving Private Ryan', films concerned with the question of what one human life is worth

and-apple-pie American pieties, suggests that the Coens aren't the only ones here with an aptitude for irony.

In point of fact, the democratic rabble of Brooklyn and environs, and the vaunted American justice system, come off rather badly through the first half of *Bridge of Spies*. Abel is tried by newspaper before his case ever reaches an unsympathetic judge. Donovan is likewise indicted in the court of public opinion, becoming a pariah for taking on such a client. He is shunned in his office, and after the windows of his home are shot out by some anonymous John Bircher, he is bullied by one of New York's Finest on his front porch. While riding the elevated subway to work, he sees a woman matching his face to a picture in the newspaper, and she greets him with a scowl of recognition. This scene will be echoed later in the film – for in *Bridge of Spies*, suspended as if by careful counterweights, it seems at times as though every scene has its opposite number – once Donovan has returned from his quest the conquering hero. This time he gets a smile of approbation from his fellow commuter, though this doesn't quite erase what has gone before, for exactly how much worth does the approval of this fickle audience carry?

Donovan's mission takes him to slushy, wintry Berlin, where we see another subtle reminder of Cold War paranoia, a theatre marquee advertising 1960's *Spartacus*, written by Dalton Trumbo, whose onscreen credit for the film began the slow process of breaking down the Hollywood blacklist. By now, however, we've left the company of Ugly Americans for that of Uglier Communists. Somewhere in transit Donovan has acquired the same chronic sniffle that plagued Abel in the States, as though exposure to unfriendly political climes triggers an allergic reaction. The Berlin Wall is nearing completion, and an American graduate student, Frederic Pryor (Will Rogers), has been detained behind it – Donovan will take up the cause of his release as well as that of Powers, despite the discouragement of his CIA liaison.

Donovan's first contact with the Agency occurs in Brooklyn, where an operative encourages him to violate attorney-client privilege, and gets a dressing down for his trouble. "We agree to the rules," he says, "that's what makes us American, and that's all that makes us American" – it's one of those soft-sell pitches that Hanks makes look easy. For Spielberg, the story of the principled Donovan – who Abel compares to a friend of his parents who stayed on his feet after a terrible beating from the tsarist police – is one in which individual honour transcends institutional corruption, and ultimately contributes to the revivification of those same institutions. In Donovan's insistence on going above and beyond the call of duty to bring both Powers and Pryor home – again, "Every person matters" – we can find a clear connection to the moral universes of *Schindler's List* (1993) or *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), films concerned with the question of what, exactly, one human life is worth. (This is also the theme of 1974's *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, though Sam Peckinpah's approach is, to put it mildly, somewhat different.) While for the most part *Bridge of Spies* traffics in the art of the veiled threat and the bluff, one moment explicitly shows how cheap life can be. Returning by train from one of his visits to the East, Donovan witnesses watch-tower guards strafing a group of defectors with gunfire as they try to climb to the other side. The scene will perhaps prove controversial, for there is

The dramatic crux of the film, visually and verbally, is a confrontation between two ways of life, two ways of doing business, and two kinds of bullshit

no small amount of nostalgia for the bad old bloc in these days of capitalism unbound, but while there is some dispute as to how often such incidents occurred – ideologically motivated murder always brings the mathematicians around to prove that, look, things weren't really *that* bad – there is no doubt that they did occur, and surely even once is more than enough.

Donovan is recruited for the job of mediation not because he can fire a gun or has any other super-spy abilities – he has to bumble his way between East and West Berlin with something less than schoolboy German at his command – but because he has the gift of gab. The very surface ordinariness of Donovan, as conceived in the film, taps into Hanks's much-discussed strengths as an 'everyman', though it also gets at an essential truth about the Cold War: that it was a largely a white-collar conflict whose battlefields were meetings and memos, a homefront war which crept into the lives of civilians, and in many cases was conducted by them. Born in 1946, Spielberg is a self-described "Sputnik baby" – a scene of Donovan's children watching *Duck and Cover* (1951), an animated civil defence film starring Bert the Turtle, might very well have been taken from memory – and his father, in his capacity as a General Electric engineer, visited Moscow on a cultural exchange. So too did many perfectly average citizens of the Soviet bloc and the United States find themselves participating in this global game of checkers between nations. This is how my great-grandfather, Harry Lohman, an employee of AT&T/Western Electric, found himself shipped off to Arctic Canada to oversee the construction of the Cold War-era Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, a system of radar stations devised to give a head's up of incoming invasion by land or sea – he puts in an appearance in a propaganda newsreel called *The DEW Line Story* – or how my grandfather's Slavic languages degree from Indiana University got him recruited into a plucky young organisation called the CIA.

Though largely committed to white-knuckle dialogue, *Bridge of Spies* does contain a few actual suspense scenes: the opening pursuit and detainment of Abel, who accepts his arrest, as he accepts everything, with phlegmatic indifference; Donovan being trailed through Brooklyn Heights by an unknown pursuer or accosted in East Berlin by a pack of seedy delinquents; Powers's struggle to activate the self-destruct mechanism on his U-2 as it plummets towards Sverdlovsk, as well as his subsequent interrogations, which seem intended to recall the 'enhanced' techniques of Guantanamo Bay; and the standoff on Glienicke Bridge, where comic relief cuts the tension as Soviet officiousness is contrasted with American casualness.

The dramatic crux of the film, visually and verbally, is a confrontation between two ways of life, two ways of doing business, and two kinds of bullshit. The Soviet bloc has its own doublespeak and tradition of bartering, not so different from the American, though to adapt to it demands that Donovan, who is learning on the fly, make ever-so-slight adjustments. ("You would say that if it were true, and if it were not true," is typical of the poker-faced pleasantries exchanged in negotiation.) There are, as ever, egos to be stoked – for example, those of the East Germans, who want a seat at the table and an opportunity to prove to the world that they aren't just a Soviet puppet state, which of course is exactly what they are. There are stalling tactics, and ways to get around them, as when Donovan buttonholes the secretary of a dismissive East German bigwig in a corridor, bicycle messengers keeping an endless river of paperwork flowing up and down the hall as they speak. Such unfamiliar details, responded to by Hanks with underplayed bemusement, give a touch of the absurd to Donovan's cocooning in Soviet red tape – it's in such moments as the awkward presentation of Abel's 'family' to Donovan (who spots that they are Soviet plants) that one most senses the hand of the Coens. The ace up Donovan's sleeve is his gradual understanding that the bureaucrats with whom he is dealing are terrified of their higher-ups in a way that he is not, which affords him a bit of leverage. His problem is that he needs to be a little bit terrified of those higher-ups too – he gets a night in an East Berlin jail cell to teach him not to underestimate the brazenness of his hosts .

With its broke-back structure and abundance of contrasting 'paired' scenes, *Bridge of Spies* holds up the US and the Soviet bloc as mirror images of one another – and, from Abel's very first appearance, the mirror is one of the film's recurring visual motifs. The idea of the superpowers as twins or doppelgangers is hardly a new or radical one – in fact, it's something of a trope in the classic Cold War thriller, though it is rarely treated to the degree of visual fluency that Spielberg gives it. One connection that even the dullest viewer couldn't fail to catch comes on Donovan's final, vindicating New York commute, when he sees from the window of his train a gang of boys surging over a chain-link fence in a Brooklyn back yard, evoking the memory of the fatal scramble over the Berlin Wall. I thought of the Odessa-born stand-up comic, Yakov Smirnoff, who attained a measure of celebrity in the 1980s by telling terrible jokes which contrasted life in bountiful America to that in bleak, shortage-racked Soviet Russia, almost exclusively to the glorification of the former and deprecation of the latter, always winding down with the barked punchline catchphrase, "I love this country!" Which is exactly what Spielberg is saying here – though with a circumspect sigh that gives the expression a note of grace.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN The surface ordinariness of chief negotiator James B. Donovan (below), as conceived in *Bridge of Spies*, taps into Tom Hanks's strengths as an everyman, though it also gets at an essential truth about the Cold War – that it was largely a white-collar conflict

***Bridge of Spies* is released in UK cinemas on 27 November and is reviewed on page 68**

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RISE OF THE MACHINES

Aaron Sorkin's screenplay for 'Steve Jobs', Danny Boyle's warts-and-all portrait of the Apple boss, eschews the traditional cradle-to-grave biopic in favour of a three-act structure focusing on the tensions and personal dramas surrounding a trio of key product launches

By David Gritten

Given the tumultuous events that marred the pre-production period of *Steve Jobs*, it would have been tempting to predict that the film itself might turn out to be disastrous. Almost everything that might have gone wrong did precisely that. It's instructive to reflect that just over a year ago, Sony was planning to make this account of Apple's complex, troubled, charismatic co-founder, with David Fincher earmarked to direct. Leonardo DiCaprio was in discussions to take the central role, and while he mulled over the prospect, Christian Bale – an equally strong candidate – showed serious interest.

But then Fincher walked off the project, having demanded a higher fee and considerable control over the film's marketing, and Danny Boyle took his place. Meanwhile, Jobs's widow Laurene Powell Jobs was lobbying to prevent the film being made at all.

It was widely agreed that Aaron Sorkin had delivered a brilliant script – a three-act structure, capturing the corporate tensions and personal dramas surrounding each of three product launches in 1984, 1988 and 1998, which Jobs, an accomplished showman, introduced in person. But Sony CEO Amy Pascal, concerned that his bold, unconventional screenplay might hinder the film's commercial prospects, balked at the budget. She and producer Scott Rudin (who had partnered with Fincher and Sorkin on *The Social Network* in 2010) engaged in an angry, bitter war of words in successive emails – which were later leaked to the world by hackers. Pascal put *Steve Jobs* into turnaround – a tax arrangement which allows a studio to sell the rights – and with Sony out of the frame, Universal acquired it. Danny Boyle, who replaced Fincher, soon insisted that Michael Fassbender, whose box-office track record was less impressive than DiCaprio or Bale, should play the title role. Pascal, meanwhile, lost her job.

This jolting series of incidents might easily have dealt a death blow to the film, or at least contributed to a mediocre end-product. Yet early reactions to *Steve Jobs* have eased such fears, with a majority of leading US critics praising its bravura filmmaking. Box-office numbers on its limited opening weekend were through the roof. And industry talk in the US already suggests the film will be a serious awards contender next spring.

It appears that Boyle, having landed the job,

FATHER OF INVENTION Michael Fassbender in the title role of *Steve Jobs*, here seen in 1988 at the launch of the NeXT Computer, which he helped create to get back at Apple after being forced out of the company in the mid-80s, in a sequence filmed in the San Francisco Opera House to create a sense of operatic revenge

refused to be cowed by the well-reported soundings of caution about the film's chances of losing money, and decided to match Sorkin's formal audacity with a go-for-broke approach of his own. Choosing Fassbender to play Jobs was already quite a statement of intent (even Sorkin initially had his doubts, at that point not having seen the actor's work); but when Universal made its own suggestions about trimming the film's budget, Boyle resisted.

"We could have shot in Hungary and saved $5 million, or in London, a more attractive choice, which would have saved $3 million," Boyle recalls. "But I said no." He dug his heels in for an expensive option: San Francisco, the nearest large city to Silicon Valley, where Jobs and his Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak had shot from obscurity to global fame.

"You think of that town as the Bethlehem of the second Industrial Revolution, the new machine age," Boyle observes. "And we got to film in that garage – the actual garage where these two guys invented the first personal computer. It was incredible."

The fact that San Francisco is also arguably the epicentre of Jobs-mania brought what Boyle calls "tangible benefits", in the form of some 3,000 local Apple devotees who turned up for a whole day three times, just to watch filming and stand in as extras for the wildly enthusiastic audiences for the product launch scenes. "We had no money to pay them," says Boyle. "We gave them each an apple and a banana, and that was it. They sat there all day applauding Michael Fassbender."

The locals made it easier for the filmmakers to replicate the sense of feverish excitement that characterised Apple's product launches. "The words 'rock concert' and 'evangelical' are right there in the script," Sorkin says. "And that's for real. Audiences banged their feet and clapped their hands. If you watch them on YouTube, the audience at the time reacts to the 1984 ad [for the original Macintosh] as if The Rolling Stones were on stage with Mick Jagger singing 'Jumpin' Jack Flash'."

There are also, as Sorkin notes, some palace-like theatres in San Francisco, which turned out to be ideal locations for the product launches – and chimed with the theatrical, almost operatic tone of his screenplay.

Boyle's response to the script was to treat it like three separate plays, each comprising a 40-minute act. As if returning to his early career as a theatre director in the 1980s, he devised a rehearsal and shooting schedule that was highly unusual for a feature film: two weeks' rehearsal, then two weeks' shooting – repeated twice for each of the script's three acts. (He also shot scenes in sequence, another departure from the norm.) An aggregate of six weeks in rehearsals is a rare luxury for film actors: but Sorkin's script, dialogue-heavy throughout, originally stretched to 177 pages, which became 185 during rehearsals – a very rough average script length in the industry is 110-120 pages – and Boyle knew that to capture the rhythms and musicality of Sorkin's writing, his actors needed to know it inside out.

He also capitalised on a real-life habit of Jobs, who disliked sitting around in meetings, always preferring to stand, or walk as he talked. Boyle incorporated this into the film's shooting style. "This is a standing-up movie," he has observed. "The actors are constantly in motion." (It didn't hurt that 'walk-and-talk' scenes had already become one of Sorkin's trademark devices.) This decision called for widespread use of Steadicam, and Boyle told the actors in rehearsals not to worry where they stood, and not to regard parts of the set as 'no-go' areas.

We got to film in that garage – the actual garage where these two guys invented the first personal computer. It was incredible

The three acts of *Steve Jobs* were also clearly defined in visual terms. Working with director of photography Alwin H. Küchler (*Hanna*, *Sunshine*, *Ratcatcher*), Boyle devised a different look for each of the product launches.

"The first [in 1984] is shot in 16mm, because it was early in Steve's career, and he's literally trying to create something – a personal computer – in front of your eyes," Boyle says. "It's almost like a creation myth. The 16mm made it rough-edged, homemade and a bit basic, and the location was a simple functional theatre in a community college in Cupertino. It all felt a bit punk, which worked."

For the second act, which follows Jobs three years after a power struggle had forced him out of Apple in 1985, Boyle and his team used 35mm and moved to the San Francisco Opera House. "This covered the period when Steve Jobs set out to make the NeXT Computer almost as an act of revenge against Apple," says Boyle, "and we wanted a location to suggest a feeling of operatic revenge, which is why we chose the Opera House. It was all gold and reds, velvet curtains and gilt edges. 35mm is rather liquid, beautiful and smooth. The design, the score, everything is meant to suggest a kind of revenge play."

For the last act, Boyle and Küchler opted for a hi-res digital camera, the Alexa, with "almost infinite pixels" and extraordinary resolution. This third act is about Jobs's possible return to Apple, and looks towards the future, with the introduction of the groundbreaking iMac. Fittingly, it was shot at the ultra-modern Davies Symphony Hall in San Francisco's downtown area. "There's nowhere to hide, it's all about clean lines of communications," says Boyle. "And watching these actors in that room was extraordinary."

Certainly one of the film's virtues is the strength in depth of its acting ensemble, and it's clear that Boyle's rehearsal regime paid off: the whole cast has comfortably mastered Sorkin's rich dialogue. Fassbender, predictably, is dominant and mesmerising as Jobs, but Kate Winslet, in a transformative role, is also striking as Joanna Hoffman, Apple's Polish-American head of marketing, one of very few people not intimidated by Jobs's mood swings

BOYLE'S LAW
Danny Boyle (on set with Aaron Sorkin, below) was determined to match the formal audacity of Sorkin's screenplay with a go-for-broke approach of his own, sticking to his guns over the casting of Michael Fassbender and the size of the film's budget

DREAM TEAM
Fassbender's Jobs with: (clockwise from left) Michael Stuhlbarg as Apple software developer Andy Hertzfeld and Kate Winslet as Apple head of marketing Joanna Hoffman; Seth Rogen as Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak; and Jeff Daniels as Apple CEO John Sculley

and hostile outbursts. Jeff Daniels, who has previously worked on Sorkin's scripts in the TV series *The Newsroom*, gives a suave, relaxed performance as John Sculley, whom Jobs hired as Apple CEO. Seth Rogen, best known for broad comedy roles, is notably strong as the decent, truthful Wozniak, who started out with Jobs in that legendary garage, and who functions as Jobs's conscience as the story progresses.

As for the script, Sorkin had known in advance he wasn't interested in "a cradle-to-grave biopic" of Jobs. His preference was to blend known public facts about Jobs with speculative scenes and exchanges behind closed doors that were crucial to his life and career. (It's an old trick – Shakespeare employed the same approach with his history plays.) This freedom to improvise from the literal truth has been Sorkin's *modus operandi* since his first nonfiction film, *Charlie Wilson's War* (2007); its director Mike Nichols had urged him to be inventive in retelling real people's lives for film. He told Sorkin repeatedly, "Art isn't about what happened."

Still, Sorkin ploughed through Walter Isaacson's 650-page biography of Jobs, combing it for clues both big and small about the man's character. He zeroed in on the fact that Jobs was given up by his birth parents and put up for adoption, and was further intrigued that his adoptive mother stayed distant and withheld affection from him for the first year of his life, fearing the baby boy might be reclaimed by his birth parents. These truths have a dramatic payoff in the film, when Jobs – "instead of using his own experience as a kind of reverse playbook," as Sorkin puts it – denies paternity of his ex-girlfriend Chrisann's daughter Lisa, even dismissing the fact that he named one of his computers 'Lisa' as a coincidence.

Sorkin was also struck by a small detail in Isaacson's book about the pandemonium backstage among Apple employees in the minutes before the 1984 product launch, when it transpired that none of his colleagues could make the Macintosh say 'hello' at its unveiling. This would make it the first computer capable of introducing itself. Early scenes in the script show Jobs in a fury, insisting that a way be found to make it happen, even if means postponing the launch.

Musing further on this titbit of history, Sorkin came to see the three product launches as ideal backdrops for the multiple dramas, both personal and professional, in Jobs's life: "I would identify five or six conflicts in Steve's life and have them played out in these scenes backstage – in places where they didn't actually take place." The launches, with their electrifying atmosphere and whooping audiences, revealed another fact of Jobs's personality: his talents as a showman and salesman. (Sorkin may also have been influenced by a brief reference in Isaacson – a quote from the *New York Times* calling Jobs "the Andrew Lloyd Webber of product introductions".)

Thus Boyle and Sorkin, working in different spheres but united in their inclination to take chances, arrived at a way to tell their story. The two men could hardly be more respectful about each other: "Danny has been a fantastic partner," Sorkin says. "As with David Fincher, he and I have had a relationship like a director and a playwright have when they do a play." And Boyle observes that, in rehearsals, "You could hear the actors purring on Aaron's dialogue. I used to think he wrote with incredible, outrageous eloquence – but it's not the language so much as the rhythm of it. It's way beyond realism, yet it feels real as well. You think, 'Yes, that's how people speak to each other.' But they don't. We're not that eloquent."

Bullishly, Boyle says the film is "immersive cinema – you get lost in it". Though it has opened strongly, that's for others to decide. Yet given the daunting catalogue of events that plagued the film only a year ago, the real wonder is that it ever got made at all.

***Steve Jobs* is released in UK cinemas on 13 November and is reviewed on page 87**

CITY OF FALLEN ANGELS

Director Sean Baker and his co-writer Chris Bergoch were determined to present a portrait of Los Angeles that looked beyond the tourist clichés of Beverly Hills and the Hollywood sign in 'Tangerine', a gritty, riotously funny night in the life of a pair of transgender sex workers

By Edward Lawrenson

The origins of *Tangerine* can be traced back to a four-word pitch that director Sean Baker made to executive producer Mark Duplass some two years ago: "Santa Monica and Highland." That's the intersection half a mile from Baker's base in Los Angeles (where he moved from New York to make his previous film, *Starlet*, which he shot in 2011). It's somehow telling that one of the sparks behind this delicately observed, riotously funny portrait of a night in the life of two transgender sex workers should be so geographically specific. *Tangerine* is, among other things, a film with a vivid and compellingly realised sense of locality. It exudes a street-level grit and vitality, its close-quarter portrait of the sidewalks and strip-malls of this LA neighbourhood intimate and freewheeling. (Yes, *Tangerine* comes heavily trailed as one of the first feature films shot entirely on an iPhone, and it looks fantastic, with thrillingly fluid camerawork often burnished by artful lens flares from the low winter sun; but the guerilla-style approach of Baker and his crew predates the launch of any product bearing the Apple logo).

"I'm new to Los Angeles," Baker says in the foyer of a London hotel the day before the BFI London Film Festival screening of *Tangerine* in October. "When I got there I was taken aback by the fact there were so many wonderful locations and subculture communities that haven't really been focused on; in film and TV we see LA as the Walk of Fame, the Hollywood sign and Beverly Hills, but we don't see all these other wonderful neighbourhoods."

Baker was further aware of Santa Monica and Highland's reputation as a locale frequented by sex workers, especially transgender sex workers. "I knew there had to be a million stories there," Baker said of this milieu, adding that *Starlet* had at its centre the character of a young porn actress, and *Tangerine*'s focus on another aspect of the sex industry was a "slight progression" from his earlier work: "I needed to get it out of my system".

The result is a comedy-drama, at turns beguiling and punchy, revolving around prostitutes Sin-Dee Rella (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez) and Alexandra (Mya Taylor). It's Christmas Eve, and in the branch of a doughnut store these two close friends, who are transitioning male to female, are catching up after Sin-Dee's release from a month-long stretch in prison (on a drugs charge for which, we discover, she isn't entirely culpable). In a throwaway aside, Alexandra lets slip that Sin-Dee's boyfriend and pimp Chester has been seeing another woman, Dinah. The betrayal – implicitly compounded by the fact that Dinah is a "fish", as Sin-Dee contemptuously refers to her cisgender status – sees Sin-Dee storming out to track down Dinah, little impeded by Alexandra's attempts to exert restraint.

It's a story, Baker explains, that grew out of an eight-month period of research he and his co-writer Chris Bergoch made into the community of transgender sex workers clustered around Santa Monica and Highland. Their fieldwork began inauspiciously. "We would just go up to [sex workers] and introduce ourselves and see what they were doing," he says. "A lot of the time the women on the streets thought we were cops or johns." So, how did you assuage their fears? "We didn't really. That was the issue. We couldn't get very far with the women who were actually working at the time; they didn't have time for us and we didn't have enough money to make it worth their time."

The turning point came when Baker decided to expand their search beyond the intersection, discovering Taylor and then Rodriguez at a local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender centre a block or so away. The two women give extraordinary performances: funny, raucous, vulnerable. Alexandra is introspective and a little guileless, Sin-Dee impulsive and streetwise, and they play together beautifully: both fiercely protective of one another – a survival mechanism that, the film leads you to suspect, has been honed by the abrasive realities of life on the streets.

What's more, the two women helped Baker and Bergoch develop their story, feeding their own experiences into the development of the script as well as their knowledge of the transgender community. Taylor's background includes a stint as a sex worker, and was key to introducing Baker to the scene. Admirably protective of his actresses, Baker brings up this point only after making clear that Taylor herself has gone on public record about her background. "I was never going to say anything to the press about it," he says, "but at the same time she brought it up just recently with [radio host] Terry Gross on NPR. To tell you the truth it's really incredibly sad because so many transwomen of colour who come from poverty have no other choice."

Matching the furious pace of Sin-Dee's womanhunt, Baker's film combines heady screwball with an unblinking depiction of Sin-Dee and Alexandra's working lives. In one of the film's best scenes Sin-Dee barges into a motel room packed with prostitutes and their johns like sardines in a tin – dragging Dinah into the street as the male clients, in varying states of undress, fall over themselves in terror. It's a sequence that reveals Baker's documentarian eye – this overcrowded brothel is closely based on one co-writer Bergoch observed during their research into the project – and his gift for staging action as exuberant physical comedy.

A NIGHT ON THE TOWN Sean Baker's *Tangerine* follows Sin-Dee (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez, top left) and Alexandra (Mya Taylor, top right) through the streets of Los Angeles as they hunt down Dinah (Mickey O'Hagan, opposite left), after she sleeps with Sin-Dee's pimp boyfriend (James Ransone, top centre)

Sin-Dee's search for Dinah and her subsequent attempt to confront Chester provide the film its barrelling comic momentum. But alongside her furious wanderings (on foot and on public transport, a rarity for LA films) Baker also portrays cab-driver Razmik's tour of the neighbourhood. A series of vignettes featuring Razmik and his passengers, this strand – with the exception of a couple of projectile-vomiting Christmas revellers who briefly occupy the back of Razmik's cab – allows for looser, more unhurried observations of LA life.

This aspect of the film grew from Baker's desire to collaborate with Karren Karagulian, a New York-based Armenian actor who has appeared in his previous work. "I told him, 'We are going to be making a film about transgender sex workers in LA and I don't know how to involve you,'" Baker says. "There's a big Armenian population in LA, and Karren says, 'Every other cab driver is Armenian so I think you can figure it out.'" Initially playing out as a separate strand from Sin-Dee and Alexandra's stories, Razmik, it turns out, has an existing business relationship with the two women and, bunking off a Christmas meal with his wife and mother-in-law, he hooks up with Alexandra in a scene of tender

'Tangerine' was a determinedly micro-budget project, its on-the-hoof production epitomised by the decision to shoot it on an iPhone

TANGERINE DREAM Director Sean Baker (below) found it difficult to gain access to the community of sex workers he wanted to document until he met the film's stars Mya Taylor (top left) and Kitana Kiki Rodriguez (top right)

single-take invention inside his car as it passes through a car-wash. The encounter here speaks to the peculiarly urban sensibility behind Baker's plot of converging elements, apparently random strangers brought together by desire and coincidence.

Razmik's family members and acquaintances, incidentally, are played by high-profile actors from Armenia. "[Karagulian's] friends came to the rescue and really helped us out on the shoot," Baker says. Razmik's fellow cab driver is Arsen Grigoryan, a big celebrity in Armenia as, among other things, the presenter of their version of *The Voice*: "He was so happy to be part of an American independent film that he flew himself to LA." Razmik's mother-in-law is played by Alla Tumanian, one of Armenia's most renowned stage and screen actresses, and in the role of his wife is Luiza Nersisyan, a well-known sitcom actress whom Baker describes as Armenia's Jennifer Aniston.

But the appearance of these name actors notwithstanding, *Tangerine* was a determinedly micro-budget project, its on-the-hoof production epitomised by that decision to shoot on an iPhone. It did, Baker says, allow for an immediacy and spontaneity that he would have struggled to achieve with a bigger crew. The passers-by, like an elderly jogger whom Sin-Dee gives a killer look, are generally real people, an approach that saw Baker's producer and assistant chase down unsuspecting 'extras' once the camera stopped recording, brandishing release forms. "Ninety-nine percent of the time it works because they're very polite, but sometimes it doesn't," Baker says. "We were on the bus one time and had a five-minute one-take scene and Kiki was amazing: she really delivered on this comic monologue and there was a guy in the foreground who didn't look at the camera for the whole five minutes. I said, 'Cut,' and leaned forward and said to him, 'Thank you so much for not looking at the camera. Do you mind if you sign a release form?' And he said, 'Yeah, sure, for $400.' We were like, 'No, it's not that kind of movie. How about $20?' And he said '$380'. We never got there. I couldn't go over 100."

***Tangerine* is released on 13 November, and is reviewed on page 88**

A MOMENT OF TRANSITION

In terms of trans representation on the screen and behind the camera, it's popular television that's driving the real change while mainstream cinema is struggling to catch up

By Sophie Mayer

At this year's BFI Flare, Sydney Freeland introduced her superb first feature *Drunktown's Finest*, shot on the Navajo reservation near Gallup, New Mexico, as "a coming-of-age story for all three genders". Felixia, one of the film's three core characters, identifies as *nadleeh*, the traditional Navajo third gender, and also refers to herself on her Facebook profile as 'Sexy Tranny FeliXXXia', confidently navigating gender identity on the res and in the white settler world. Played by Carmen Moore, a Navajo transwoman in her first screen role, Felixia is both a unique character and part of the long history and proliferating present of trans cinema.

Freeland's latest project *Her Story*, an online drama series focused on transwomen, is part of what *Time* magazine has called the "transgender tipping point", pointing in particular to the success of Laverne Cox as Sophia in Jenji Kohan's *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-) on Netflix. Jill Soloway's *Transparent* (2014-) on Amazon Prime and the Wachowskis' Netflix sci-fi series *Sense8* have repeated *Orange*'s feat of producing popular dramas that not only include but centre on trans characters – in the case of *Sense8*, with a trans co-creator (Lana Wachowski) and trans performer (Jamie Clayton).

BBC2 has caught up, with romcom *Boy Meets Girl*, starring trans actress Rebecca Root, who follows Bethany Black's success in a small role in Russell T. Davies's *Cucumber*. In terms of trans representation on screen and behind the camera, popular television is driving the change, and mainstream cinema is struggling to catch up. Films such as *The Danish Girl* (Tom Hooper) and *About Ray* (Gaby Dellal) have been criticised before release for casting cisgender performers as their titular trans characters and telling their stories from a cis perspective.

As Juliet Jacques explores in her new book *Trans: A Memoir*, the history of trans representation in mainstream and canonical cinema is triply tragic: first for its scarcity, second for its frequent transphobia, and third for its melodramatic, often deathly endings. Drawn to cinema for its ability to transcend and queer the binarism of verbal language, Jacques constructs a trans canon that begins

with the Factory and Fassbinder, although she is troubled by the tragic portrayal of Elvira in *In a Year with 13 Moons* (1978) and more compelled by the riotous, politicised gender subversion of Candy Darling and Jackie Curtis in Paul Morrissey's *Women in Revolt* (1971).

Jacques also points to the gender play in the work of other New York avant-garde fringe filmmakers, such as George Kuchar and Jack Smith, who may not have set out to document the radical queer underground of which they were part, but were certainly captivated by it. In their films, as in their community, drag artists and gender non-conforming performers are part of a wholesale rejection of social convention. Derek Jarman's *Glitterbug* (1994), composed of Super 8 film shot at the Alternative Miss World balls he helped organise and other parties and protests he attended, offers a similar view of London, at once documentation and an imaginative, romantic celebration.

Both amplified by and disrupted by the AIDS/HIV crisis, the avant-garde commitment to gender subversion and trans politics continued into the 1980s, captured in the radical performance work and public service announcements of the activist group ACT UP. Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris Is Burning* (1990), which critic Ashley Clark calls "now-canonical – if permanently controversial", depicted New York's Afro-Latinx queer and trans ball culture as it faced both AIDS/HIV and co-optation into the mainstream. Likewise, in American and European cinema, the 1990s saw trans representation edge into the indie mainstream, in historical dramas such as Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992) and Maggie Greenwald's *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) that problematised the very idea of stable gender, and Kimberly Peirce's garlanded *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), which focused on transphobia. As Jacques points out, there was also a celebratory moment that saw joyous trans comedies from Stephan Elliott, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), and Alain Berliner, *Ma vie en rose* (1997), gain international audiences.

In Hollywood, at least, the post-New Queer Cinema door slammed shut in the early 2000s. Bush's neo-conservatism disrupted the subversive energy captured in Monika Treut's 1999 San Francisco-set documentary *Gendernauts* (one of the few prominent films to focus on transmasculine and intersex, rather than transfeminine, characters). Brazilian film *Madame Satã* (2002), Karim Aïnouz's debut, was a reminder of a global trans cinema in which gender roles and transition had different valences to the Anglophone West.

Rosa von Praunheim and Ulrike Ottinger (in 1981's *Freak Orlando*) had continued

Trump card: Laverne Cox as Sophia in Jenji Kohan's Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black*

Fassbinder's queer energy through the New German Cinema, and Pedro Almodóvar, particularly in *All About My Mother* (1999), highlighted the politically disruptive potential of trans characters, in contrast to the assimilationist narrative of Duncan Tucker's *Transamerica* (2005). The protagonists of Lucía Puenzo's 2007 film *XXY*, in which the lead character Alex is intersex; Sophie Hyde's *52 Tuesdays* (2013); and Céline Sciamma's *Tomboy* (2011) and *Girlhood* (2014) have brought questions of gender transition into the global arthouse, and into the family drama.

The millennium also saw the emergence of trans feature filmmakers such as Ester Martin Bergsmark, whose *She Male Snails* (2012) and *Something Must Break* (2014) both depict trans subjects. In *Celluloid Ceiling*, Anchalee Chaiworaporn notes that Tanwarin Sukkhapisit and Sarasawadee Wongsompetch, both *kathoey* (transgender) directors who identify as female, have been the most productive female filmmakers in Thailand. LGBTQ+ and trans-specific film festivals have offered support and visibility to a wave of North American documentary and short filmmakers that includes Sam Feder, StormMiguel Florez, Raphael Fox, Markus Harwood-Jones, Gwen Haworth, Silas Howard and Kortney Ryan Ziegler.

Trans representation in popular cinema has been triply tragic: for its scarcity, transphobia and its often deathly endings

Wu Tsang's experimental docu-fiction *Wildness*

Wu Tsang's experimental docu-fiction *Wildness* (2012), like Sean Baker's *Tangerine*, focuses on a community of transwomen of colour, recentring their narrative at just the moment when the supposed 'tipping point' has produced whitewashing and other forms of erasure, as in Roland Emmerich's *Stonewall*. The film's voiceover was delivered and co-written by Guatemalan-American transgender actress Mariana Marroquin, one of the performers at the Silver Platter, a working-class LA drag bar where Wu and a group of trans and gender non-conforming artists started their own event. Like Maria Binder's 2014 documentary *Trans X Istanbul* and Campbell X's *Stud Life* (2012), *Wildness* confronts issues of class and gentrification as aspects of gender non-conforming lives.

Rather than depicting the individual, often isolated, journey of transition, these films feature characters who have transitioned living within gender-diverse communities – a narrative shape unlikely to reach mainstream cinema. Likewise, transman Kingston Farady, star of Cheryl Dunye's *Black Is Blue* (2014), was never likely to get a look-in during the recent casting of Black Panther for the forthcoming Marvel film, while cis actors continue to play Hollywood's heroic-tragic trans roles. It's up to Apichatpong Weerasethakul to shoot a sequel to *The Adventures of Iron Pussy* (2003), his collaboration with Michael Shaowanasai, and deliver the trans superhero/ine we need.

THE MATING GAME

Hollywood might not have invented the romantic comedy, which has roots stretching all the way back to ancient Greece, but it did reinvent it in a delirious and uniquely American way, recognising along the way the crucial role that hate and animosity can play in every love affair

By Molly Haskell

At the dawn of cinema, viewers were stunned by the spectacle of workers leaving factories and magicians disappearing into thin air, charmed by cops chasing wayward motorcars, by picnics with babies and pranks with hoses, but perhaps most staggering of all was an 18-second 'adult' movie showing lovers doing what lovers do but had heretofore done only in private. The year was 1896, the film was Edison's *The Kiss*, and audiences were scandalised by a pair of portly Victorians conjoined in what is presumed to be the screen's first demonstration of that staple of romantic love. Edison's 'remake', *The Kiss* of 1900, features a more youthful pair engaging in rabbit-nibble kissing and as much chaste canoodling as can be contained in the 40-second running time. The man still sports a moustache but is thinner and more agile, as is the lady love.

Thus does the motion picture earn its name, amping up the action factor, declaring its independence from the theatre. (May Linn, of the original *Kiss*, had come directly from a play of the same name, also a media sensation, whereas the new lovers are entirely photogenic). But also, almost inadvertently, these two blips of celluloid depict the changes in mores and taste in a mere four years – in fashion, in dress, in looks and in the degree of raciness acceptable on the screen.

In *The Kiss*, 1 and 2, we have the formative ingredients of romantic comedy as it would be enshrined and popularised by Hollywood – a demonstration of the techniques of courtship and a lexicon of the physical language of attraction, all the articles of romance leading inevitably to marriage in which movies took it upon themselves to educate their new mass audience. Missing from these two samples of mutual attraction, however, is the other and equally important side of the equation: the counterforce of hate, the reactive force of anger, the morning-after hangover of domesticity. An early short of roughly the same vintage, less well known, is called *Shut Up!* (1902): a drunken man arrives home to a volley of abuse from his awakened wife, whereupon he silences her, literally, by folding her away in a Murphy bed. His victory will be understood as Pyrrhic, or at least simply another skirmish in an unending war.

Think of the films as opposite sides of a coin, each visible only in turn until combined in the romantic comedy of the 30s and 40s, which recognised that hate was an essential part of love, and that aggression and animosity were not an argument against love but its confirmation. In formalising this opposition, the best of the romantic comedies to come would end on a note of uncertainty and irresolution, 'happy endings' more in name and convention than predictors of the future. "And they lived happily ever after," intones a voice at the end of Preston Sturges's *The Palm Beach Story* (1942), before adding, "Or did they?"

LABYRINTHS OF PASSION Thomas Edison's The Kiss (1896, above) presented lovers doing what they had traditionally only done in private; while Ernst Lubitsch's *Angel* (1930, right), with Herbert Marshall, Marlene Dietrich and Melvyn Douglas, showed a woman's desire for something more than mere marriage

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

In envisioning love/courtship as a battle between two evenly matched warriors, Hollywood didn't invent the romantic comedy, which has a legacy of structural motifs dating back to ancient Greece. After all, a feminist impulse to turn the tables on the patriarchal arrangement of society had been invigorating the battle of the sexes from time immemorial. Women chafing at boundaries or exacting revenge for having been demeaned and marginalised, go back to the comedy of Aristophanes, the tragedy of Euripides. In New Comedy, the 'mythoi' of the Greeks (in Northrop Frye's term) are transmitted by Plautus and Terence, and the couple emerges as the fulcrum of change. The hero and heroine come together at the end, displacing the obstructionist 'usurpers' and forming a new society around themselves in a festive ritual that is but a foreshadowing, *mutatis mutandis*, of the wedding and bridesmaid pandemonium of today.

With Benedick and Beatrice and the untamed shrew, and with his cross-dressing hero/heroines, Shakespeare the great moderniser refines and expands the couple by upgrading the waspish woman into worthy protagonist, a beautiful and spirited counterpart of the valiant hero. The romantic heroine who can speak for herself and is unwilling to "dwindle" into marriage continues with Congreve's Millamant and Mirabell, and the sparring duellers of Restoration comedy, energised – by no means coincidentally – by the fact that for the first time, actual women are playing the roles. The forces of democracy and equality were creeping on to page and stage. Jane Austen moved the battle into the middle class, where the idea of marrying for love rather than in compliance with property arrangements had begun to take root. The brainy heroines of Shaw, profiting from the clarion call of Ibsen's Nora, demand respect as individuals, and want something more than domesticity and the condescending halo granted to the 'little woman'.

Nor would Hollywood originate the 'remarriage comedy'. Noël Coward's *Private Lives* in 1930 was the spark that lit a succession of sophisticated divorces like Amanda and Elyot, who can neither live together nor stay apart. And of all the pitched battles of romantic comedy one of the greatest is the English (or should I say Scottish?) Powell-Pressburger movie, *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945), in which the lyrical and querulous voices of, respectively, Roger Livesey and Wendy Hiller, sing of mutual attraction even while the characters are fuming and fleeing one another. There were many outside influences, not least the theatre, which post-1930 was furnishing plays and playwrights – many of them East Coast writers bringing a New York edge – and actors who knew how to speak their lines for the newly vocal medium.

But if Hollywood didn't invent romantic comedy, it reinvented it in a delirious and uniquely American way. "Contrary to what it seems, comedy was in reality the most serious genre in Hollywood – in the sense that it reflected through the comic mode the deepest moral and social beliefs of American life," André Bazin said in a 1948 review, quoted by James Harvey in his book *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood*.

What could be more American than the notion that you can make your own life, reinvent yourself apart from family, and that love is an instrument – *the* instrument – of that liberation? The folding of romance into marriage was a sacred ideal dreamt up by a country of cockeyed optimists, and instilled in its willing acolytes – worshippers at the cinematic shrine – by a galaxy of screenwriters and directors, Hollywood craftsmanship in the service of star power.

What could be more American than the notion that you can make your own life, reinvent yourself apart from family, and that love is the instrument of that liberation?

Europeans were more fatalistic. They knew that romance and marriage were incompatible, that the individualism of *amour fou* was anarchic and antisocial, at odds with an institution whose very existence is founded on cooperation, and the submersion of the self (and of women's sexual desires) for the sake of family and stability. The two impulses – spontaneity and freedom of love on the one hand, the predictability and discipline of marriage on the other – were profoundly at odds.

Instrumental to the new shape of romantic comedy, both constraining and liberating, was censorship. By 1934 in response to a public outcry against the immorality and salaciousness of movies and the movie colony, the Hays Office began to rigidly enforce the restrictions of the Production Code.

As if made to order, that same year saw the runaway success of a quickly made comedy starring Claudette Colbert and Clark Gable, Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934). The heiress (Colbert) proved she could adapt to a hand-to-mouth existence, the rugged newspaper man learned to cook breakfast, and the walls of Jericho remained tantalisingly erect through some of the more wistfully erotic dialogue ever recorded. The boisterous humour and enshrinement of the little man in the Capra movie helped put an end to the overt sexiness and swank and splendour, the rarefied hi-jinks of pre-Code movies. Shenanigans in the boudoir, delectable negligée-wearing heroines, racy *double entendres*, were out; philanderers had to be punished and divorce was taboo. Heiresses would get their toes wet, scions would play at being hobos, fortune hunters would renounce wealth for love among the proletariat.

In the movement away from the traditional male-female seductions of pre-Code films, the arena for women's activity expanded; the anarchy and chaos that were already present in slapstick comedies from the beginning now became the province of the stars in screwball comedies. Men and women went at it, hammer and tong, words and pratfalls. Proud male stars like Cary Grant and Jimmy Stewart and Henry Fonda would undergo mortifications of the flesh and spirit, at the hands of manic viragos, played by beauties like Carole Lombard and Katharine Hepburn and Barbara Stanwyck and Irene Dunne and Claudette Colbert. The obstructions that society had placed in the way of lovers in Plautus and now Terence sprang from the neurotic psyches of the couple themselves, and there had to be sufficient adversarial baggage to keep them apart until the final reel.

Until Hollywood put its puritan stamp on romance, passion belonged to illicit love: it was in feudal times, as the cultural theorist Denis de Rougement pointed out, that romantic love was born on the lyre of singers wooing the (married) objects of their desire. But it is in the land of the Puritans that the ideal of romantic love is taken out of the arena of adultery where it was born and appropriated into the sanctuary (and sacrament) of marriage.

The difference between the great Lubitsch and the romantic comedy that succeeded him (and to whose demands he would adapt brilliantly) was a simple formula: in Hollywood comedy marriage is forever, whereas in

LABOURS OF LOVE (From top) Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert in Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934), Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda in Preston Sturges's *The Lady Eve* (1941), and Gary Cooper and Fredric March with Miriam Hopkins in Ernst Lubitsch's *Design for Living* (1933)

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (3)

Lubitsch marriage is forever, but so is adultery. As the reigning comic genius of 20s and pre-Code cinema, he had paved the way, introducing a worldly sophistication and *savoir faire* that combined European worldliness with American innocence. He was the maestro of sly and witty marital comedies of the silent era (His 1925 adaptation of *Lady Windermere's Fan* was thought by most to be superior to Wilde's play), of saucy and exquisitely funny operettas (the Jeanette MacDonald-Maurice Chevalier musicals), and of masterpieces like *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) and *Design for Living* (1933) involving patricians and playboys and playgirls locked in heady triangles that suggested that if that peculiar form was not quite practicable as a permanent arrangement, it is, like it or not, the primal relationship from which we're all sprung, the shadow of loss, or of 'someone else', hovering over and tugging at the nuptial bliss of the couple.

Because marriage itself was forever, it had to be recast as an adventure, rewired for the modern woman. America had always been a more mobile society, both in terms of class and geography. Barriers were resistant but, except for the taboo against sex, not insurmountable. Stuffy parents could be softened or overcome, patrician ways (with which Americans were congenitally uncomfortable) could be discarded at the drop of a hat. Long distances could be traversed. Think of all the trips: Claudette Colbert up from Monte Carlo to Paris in *Midnight (1939)*; the bus trip in *It Happened One Night*; an ocean voyage in *The Lady Eve* (1941); train trips in *The Palm Beach Story*, *Twentieth Century* (1934) and *The Major and the Minor* (1942). Relations between men and women were less settled, and this sense of possibilities provided a wider canvas for the action painting of romance.

Indeed the voyage, literally or metaphorically, was the emblem of the odyssey toward a new definition of marriage. In the laboratory of war, a different sort of compatibility was imagined, no longer founded on the traditional equation of active male and passive female.

The remarriage comedy, according to the philosopher Stanley Cavell, is a "conversation in the service of woman's need of an education", a moulting and rebirth that would equip her to take her place in a discourse of equals, a meeting of minds that bears echoes of Milton's "meet and happy conversation". To set the stage for this noble and desirable ideal, and to level the playing field, a good deal of stylisation is required. Nobody is wanting for money, and when lovers are poor (as would happen more frequently during the Depression), they still radiated the charisma of movie stars. (One of the loveliest twists on this charade, of Big People pretending to be Little People yearning to be Big People, comes in Lubitsch's *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), when lowly clerks Margaret Sullavan and James Stewart imagine their pen pals as movie-star kind and beautiful. After all, in the code language and lighting of Hollywood star glamour, beauty equals virtue.)

Children are ruthlessly excluded. Even when they are not engaged in rambunctious aggression, the women are witty, verbal, independent-minded – traits that mark them as the antithesis of maternal, domestic. We realise the importance of childlessness when offspring do rear their little heads – as in *My Favorite Wife* (1940) with Irene Dunne, and the later suburban comedies of Doris Day. The balloon deflates, and the sense

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (3)

SHAGGY DOG STORIES Cary Grant and Irene Dunne in Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth* (1937, above); Carole Lombard, Walter Connolly and Fredric March in William Wellman's *Nothing Sacred* (1937, far left); and Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn and James Stewart in *The Philadelphia Story* (1940, left)

of delicious compatibility disappears. They can't have children because they are, in some sense, still children themselves (literalised in Hawks's 1952 *Monkey Business*), pre-sexual, having the kind of fun that is impossible under the daily burdens of marriage. Hawks's entire comic *oeuvre* is in thrall to the lure of irresponsibility. His characters can't imagine growing old, unlike the more worldly-wise characters of Lubitsch and Sturges. In a melancholy note in *The Palm Beach Story*, the millionaire 'Wienie King' tells Colbert she'll not only get over her money troubles, she'll get over being young: "Some day you'll wake up and find everything behind you."

Auteurs of a more European cast of mind are less sanguine about the sex appeal of marriage. One of the greatest and least appreciated comedies of the 30s, Lubitsch's *Angel* (1937), starring Marlene Dietrich, Herbert Marshall and Melvyn Douglas, gives delicate expression to a woman's continuing desire for something more than marriage, something to stir the fires when the marital embers fade. In a remarkable performance, expressing a kind of bewildered yearning, Dietrich's straying Belle de Jour visits an upscale Parisian brothel, a *maison de rendez-vous* presided over by an expat Russian aristocrat. Douglas is no Pierre Clémenti of the kind found in Buñuel's film; rough trade is not in the offing. Both the anguish and the comedy (how deftly Lubitsch interweaves the two) come from the extreme attractiveness of both men, husband (Marshall) and would-be lover (Douglas), who far from being Mr Wrong and Mr Right, have a great deal in common. The triangle must give way to the couple, but not without a sense of loss. *Angel*, like *The Palm Beach Story*, was too subtle for viewers and critics of the time, accustomed to the rambunctiousness of screwball comedy. In one exquisitely indirect scene, the three leads are lunching in baronial splendour, but Lubitsch tells the story of their emotional turmoil (or lack thereof) entirely through the (mis-)interpretations of the servants who carry in their full or empty plates.

The criticism that 30s comedies lack social or political bite and ignore the misery of the Depression enveloping the world around them is not so much beside the point as missing the point: for one thing, audiences who had little interest in watching the downtrodden were elated by these visions of luxury and fun. For another, the message was implicit and inferential: only such women, women who can speak in sentences (hence educated) and who have some confidence in themselves as individuals, can exercise choice and freedom to begin with.

This, then, was their claim to an equal hearing. Women had always been the listeners, the mirrors magnifying men's egos; now, with an arrogance not available to most women (and that would one day get them labelled box-office poison) they would be listened to (even if they were blabbering nonsense, as Carole Lombard was wont to do). They declared their own ironic distance from the self-sacrificial woes and rapturous suffering of the heroines of melodrama.

If this vision of equality was more aspirational than real, given the society that surrounded them, the expression of it, the longing for it, was the first step in the concrete demands to come. This, said these heroes and heroines, was what an equal marriage might look like.

One great factor in the popularity of these comedies was the emergence of star couples. In the 20s and early 30s, the actors and actresses usually went solo, but some lucky pairings like Colbert and Gable, and Myrna Loy and William Powell in *The Thin Man* (1934), led to a roundelay of co-stars with chemistry to burn. It was the Depression and having two for the price of one worked out well for moviegoers, hence for studios. They magically illustrated the push-pull of romantic comedy, not just in the genre but in the characters themselves: wanting to surrender, not wanting to surrender. The ambiguity is expressed in the very timbre of their inimitable, instantly recognisable voices: the dizzy glissando of Carole Lombard, the touching and funny tremulo of Margaret Sullavan, the baffled courtliness of Herbert Marshall, the wise-guy gentlemanly snarl of William Powell, the desperate Cockney dignity in Grant's pleading for sanity, and on and on, with nothing remotely comparable today.

All the assets of the studio system were brought to bear on the love-hate, sex-but-no-sex paradox that constituted the sacrament of the New Marriage in a vision of transcendence, of transformation. The nimbus of light, the absolute beauty of two people, heralds a quasi-religious and near-ecstatic consummation whereby the carnal is transubstantiated into the spiritual, and the greed of passion and the voluptuousness of surrender are reconciled. It goes without saying that we identify with those larger-than-life figures – in our fantasies, like Sullavan and Stewart, we are always the stars, deserving of a star-partner, never the second leads. (It is why actual sex on the screen distracts and troubles us: voyeurism replaces adoration, and among other things it no longer allows us to endow love with the sense of transcendence.)

But society is on the move and the moment can't last. Paradox dissolves into contradiction as the barriers crumble and rates of divorce rise, and the notion of courtship devolves into hookups and online dating and group hanging out. The centrality of romance, or perhaps of the heterosexual couple as the defining unit of love and marriage, disappears along with the kind of actors who made it convincing. In a way, the aura of independence radiated by the swaggering dames of the 30s and 40s is predicated on the powerlessness of real women in the real world. (An inverse ratio also existed between the awesomely dangerous women of Athenian tragedy and the housebound and invisible women of Greek society.)

The romantic 'faith' was based on a certain complementarity: they could play at gender roles because in the end, they would still be male and female, irretrievably masculine, unmistakably feminine. The couple could contain, for one brief moment, the tension between the ideal of surrender and that of self-fulfilment. Already by the late 30s, there was a limit to what women could get away with. Stars like Dietrich and Garbo were branded box-office poison, and by 1940 Hepburn was apologising for being Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story* in a successful bid to win back the audience who had deserted her.

As soon as the battles for equality began showing results, with women going to university, entering the workforce, making money, having careers, they would threaten the balance of power. That was always the subtext of the romantic comedies, the 'crisis of masculinity'. The 50s is awash with sissy men like Tom Ewell and Tony Randall, and the Doris Day-Rock Hudson comedies bring the anxiety into the open. The prurience of the stories, her 'professional virginity', are becoming

passé. Pillow Talk (1959) and *Lover Come Back* (1961) work beautifully, but also queasily. Day can be both ballsy and attractive, playing off Hudson's charm as a lazy or unscrupulous Momma's boy... but just barely. As an ambitious ad executive in the professional world in *Lover Come Back*, she threatens to upset the equilibrium of romantic comedy. Her hubris is constantly exposed and derided. She accuses Hudson of using sex to snare clients, and says, in disgust, "Let me tell you something: I wish I were a man right now..." "Keep trying," says Hudson, "You'll make it."

Soon the cinema, as if in wholesale retaliation, would come under the sway of blockbuster movies designed by (male) committees: sci-fi fantasies, superhero action and franchise movies, or slacker bromances geared to the adolescent male. The boy-girl romantic comedy was still a staple, but increasingly strained. It was not just that all the taboos, the brakes and barriers were gone, not just that marriage wasn't forever. It was also the women, the actresses themselves. They engaged in a massive retreat, compensating for real power in the masquerade of powerlessness. Romantic heroines did penance, became bimbos or ditzes, or cutesy (Meg Ryan), nerdy (Sandra Bullock), socially maladroit (Renée Zellweger's Bridget Jones), girly-girl (Julia Roberts) or just boring (Kate Hudson). (Thank heaven for Jennifer Lawrence and Amy Adams.) The men became more feminised: Hugh Grant had a Cary Grant quality, Colin Firth was a dreamy leading man, but neither had the stalwart maleness of their predecessors. The gay guy (Rupert Everett) was more romantic than the straight (Dermot Mulroney) in *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997). Matinee idols like George Clooney and Harrison Ford prefer hanging out with the guys (*Ocean's Eleven*, *Twelve* et al) or swinging through middle age as Indiana Jones. Love, as defined by the Hollywood romantic comedy, has changed: gender is fluid, sexual orientation no longer predetermined; the heterosexual couple loses some of its lustre as the focal point of the turning world. As genres, romance and comedy, whether separate or combined, had never gotten the critical or award-winning attention they deserved, but now even the labels 'romcom' and 'chick flick' denote a descent to the lower rungs of critical respectability.

The true heir to romantic comedy, alas, is the bromance, which celebrates fun and hi-jinks of likeminded buddies in an arena in which sex is still taboo. The Judd Apatow playbook of doofus men slacking and smoking represents a triumph of Hawksian irresponsibility and regression, a retreat from marriage and domesticity, and a sublimation of the erotic in male bonding. And, in another turn-up for the books, Apatow teamed with Amy Schumer to make one of the hits of the past summer, *Trainwreck*, a blend of feminist raunch and cringe humour with saving romcom grace. The movie features Schumer's wild signature brand of modern single woman – defensive lonely girl drunk making a mess of things – but provides an adorable Bill Hader to endure her guff, and, as resilient as any screwball male charmer of the past, persuade her to surrender to love in the end. Critics complained the movie went soft, and undermined Schumer's bad-girl creds, but an invective-spewing comedy skit is one thing, an entire movie of no-holds-barred anti-bourgeois aggression would be another thing altogether. The language is ballsy and blunt, the actions often more embarrassing than funny, proof of the greater latitude afforded women these days (more so on comedy shows and cable TV than in movies) to behave badly, risk losing audience sympathy... and still – maybe/somehow/occasionally – love and be loved in return.

THE ALCOHOL YEARS Amy Schumer's recent *Trainwreck*, which offers a blend of feminist raunch, cringeworthy humour and romcom charm, shows the greater latitude afforded women these days to behave badly on screen

Romance and comedy have never gotten the critical attention they deserved, but now even the labels 'romcom' and 'chick flick' denote a descent to the lower rungs of respectability

But despair not, those who still thrill to the spell cast by a man and woman engaged in anguished conversation. The courtship-marriage comedy has not deserted us, but has been recast in real locations as an existential movement through space and time. I'm thinking of Richard Linklater's extraordinary *Before...* trilogy and the way the intricate defences of love and character are slowly exposed by Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke as they are tracked through the byways of Vienna, Paris and Greece. And hovering over Linklater's lovers from the still female-oriented cinema of France, is Eric Rohmer, the great choreographer of love as erotic conversation. His triangles (or quadrangles) of charming and stubborn and vacillating young people philosophise and rationalise and finally choose (or flee) a mate (inevitably making what we think is the wrong choice, but how can we be sure?), and live with that choice. Rohmer thus keeps alive the sense of love's consequence, but he introduces a very contemporary note of uncertainty. Affinities change, we are different with different people, and the impenetrable mystery of who we are, therefore who we love, lies largely in the unfathomable recesses of the unconscious. The Hollywood pairings came to seem inevitable, the union of soul mates. Rohmer's not so much. We change from moment to moment, a battleground of opposites, of conquest and surrender, power and powerlessness. Once we believed in free will, in the dialectic and synthesis of mutual choice embodied in the perfect fit of the beautiful couple. Now we must reckon with less iconic representatives, everyday neurotics whose sometimes messy lives and provisional happy endings speak to the puzzle as to how much our so-called choices reflect mastery of our fate, or instead the mysterious promptings of the unconscious which we later call Destiny.

This article is taken from *LOVE: A BFI Compendium*, a new book published to accompany the BFI's major UK-wide celebration of love in the cinema and television, which runs until the end of December and includes a season of films at BFI Southbank, London

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PROFILE

LEFT TO HIS OWN DEVICES

Ornery, confrontational and a stranger to slickness, Travis Wilkerson may be the political conscience of American cinema

By Neil Young

At the start of his 1927 novel *Red Harvest*, Dashiell Hammett introduces his readers to Personville, known to its inhabitants as 'Poisonville': "an ugly city of forty thousand people, set in an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been all dirtied up by mining". Personville is Butte, Montana, where Hammett had worked for the Pinkerton Detective Agency, employed as strike-breakers by local mine-owners: Hammett claimed to have turned down an offer of $5,000 to murder the union leader Frank Little.

As a proud local, the director Travis Wilkerson provides a more sympathetic, complex, even picturesque view of Butte in his films *An Injury to One* (2002) and *Who Killed Cock Robin?* (2005). The first of these, a 53-minute, 16mm documentary, has become a landmark in the sparsely populated terrain that is American socialist cinema. Hauntingly poetic and fiercely angry, this minor masterpiece proceeds as a twin-track investigation into Little's 1917 lynching and the area's manifold woes in the 20th century's final decades ("The economic crisis here started earlier than it did for the rest of the United States," notes a character in *Cock Robin*, Wilkerson's first venture into fiction). Wilkerson traces the roots of Butte's particular crisis to the pre-World War II exploitation of the land and its people by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and their hired thugs. His clipped voiceover forensically chronicles Anaconda's manifold evils, in a picture whose tragic narrative unfolds with thriller-like urgency. The 'plot' is punctuated by lyrical interludes in which the present-day landscape is surveyed and instrumental versions of labour-anthems are heard while their text appears line by line across the screen.

The flurries of onscreen text – key words and slogans – in both his fiction and his non-fiction epitomise Wilkerson's maximalist instincts. His aesthetic is confrontational, mistrustful of anything resembling slickness or sugar-coating; his films have one foot in the present but seek answers and parallels in the recent, often misrepresented past. Not for him the commercially-minded compromises of more ballyhooed American cinema leftists such as John Sayles, Michael Moore and Oliver Stone, who successfully navigate commercial channels between 'indie' rivulets and the mainstream.

A one-man band who always takes care of editing and cinematography, Wilkerson has insisted on ploughing his own ornery furrow. He can be called, with only slight exaggeration, the political conscience of 21st-century American independent cinema. But at 46, his career epitomises the practical hazards

Not for him the compromises of more ballyhooed American cinema leftists such as Sayles, Moore and Stone

'No wonder I've never sold out. Clearly, I have nothing whatsoever to sell': Travis Wilkerson

facing left-wing artists in the USA. Those who can, teach: in the mid-2000s Wilkerson had a spell at CalArts, where he had previously been a student, making *An Injury to One* as his MFA thesis, and he has also done stints at the University of Colorado and Pomona College, California, where his tenure ended this summer: "The experimental program I was running ran out of grant," he told me in a recent email. "It was wonderful while it lasted. Unemployed."

Notwithstanding encomiums from the likes of *Film Comment* ("the anti-Ken Burns") and *Reverse Shot* ("a cinematic poetics uniquely his own"), Wilkerson has been a prophet accorded only occasional honour in his own country and little more abroad. *Cock Robin* – a stark three-hander examining how wider socio-economic forces warp the lives of intelligent invididuals – received a largely hostile reception when it premiered at Sundance a decade ago. It is a rough-edged affair in which Wilkerson struggles to adapt his ideas to fictional formats (unsurprisingly, he has only just returned to narrative, with this summer's *noir*-ish, paranoid Los Angeles anti-romance *Machine Gun or Typewriter?*). Re-edited by Wilkerson in 2007 and again in 2010, it is undergoing a belated reappraisal: Dennis Lim included it in his list of Top 10 Overlooked Sundance Films ("a bold and unfashionable film in every sense, not least its earnest political stand").

That second – and presumably final – re-edit of *Who Killed Cock Robin?* initiated a productive spell for Wilkerson. 2011 yielded *Distinguished Flying Cross*, an hour-long near-monologue by his war-veteran father – flanked by his sons Travis and Dylan, the trio happily sipping on beers – about his time as an army pilot in Vietnam; *Sand Creek Equation*, a 25-minute juxtaposition of a 19th-century massacre of Native Americans and the current situation in Palestine; and *Pluto Declaration*, a tongue-in-cheek four-minute Marxist defence of Pluto's planetary status ("the term 'dwarf planet' betrays its blatant chauvinism... Imperialist science distilled to its barbaric essence!") which neatly showcases Wilkerson's dry, often hidden sense of humour.

Around the same time, Wilkerson made the bluntly accusatory 25-minute *Fragments of Dissolution* for the portmanteau project *Far from Afghanistan* (released 2012), giving voice to four American women whose bereavements highlight governmental negligence and/or perfidy at home and overseas. The damaging activities of the US government's various militarised arms have been a focus of Wilkerson's ire since *National Archive Vol.1* (2001), a simple, devastating 15-minute-long collage of footage shot from bomber-planes dropping lethal cargo on Vietnam.

In 2011, too, Wilkerson received a retrospective from the Slovenian Cinematheque, alongside a focus on his primary influence, Cuba's newsreel/agit-prop maestro Santiago Alvarez (*Now*, 1965; *79 Springs*, 1969), whom he adoringly profiled in his 65-minute debut *Accelerated Under-development: in the Idiom of Santiago Alvarez*. A chance meeting with Alvarez in Cuba in 1995, three years before his death, was the turning-point in Wilkerson's artistic life. Alvarez – himself radicalised in the coalmines of 1930s Pennsylvania – opened the doorway to Third Cinema, the grassroots

***Distinguished Flying Cross* (2011)**

cinematic movement associated with Glauber Rocha, Fernando Solanas and Med Hondo, and with which Wilkerson proudly identifies. A breathless paean still relatively neglected even by Wilkerson admirers, *Accelerated Under-development* laid down personal guidelines for all that has followed. Wilkerson's online publishing project *Now! A Journal of Urgent Praxis* ("crossroads between film-journal and radical newsreel... digital flint and steel") takes its title from one of Alvarez's films; and his work informs each of Wilkerson's jeremiads against what he sees as a world thrown out of whack by myopic capitalism: Alvarez's films, Wilkerson says, "were born of rage, bitter irony, and an almost limitless spirit of solidarity... They showed the world to be forever changing, and changeable. And they were always made for the here and now."

Wilkerson completed *Accelerated Under-development* in 1999, but re-edited it four years later. That is typical of his approach to his longer projects. He is now working on a new version of 2013's *Los Angeles Red Squad: The Communist Situation in California*, which focuses on the LA police department's pre-WWII role as paid political militia, systematically breaking up left-wing meetings. Part of a projected trilogy on American police violence, it seemed structurally lopsided when premiering at FIDMarseille, the semi-digestible fruit of what had begun as a more ambitious and expensive enterprise. Wilkerson had planned "a historical narrative with actors and costumes, a black comedy even if everything was also true," but after adding up the figures he semi-reluctantly opted for a stripped-down, essayistic approach. Scraping together even sub-shoestring budgets has always been a Sisyphean endeavour for Wilkerson. Hopes were high for *An Injury to One*'s belated DVD release in 2011, but after three months only 56 units had shifted. "No wonder I've never sold out," Wilkerson says: "Clearly, I have nothing whatsoever to sell."

This summer, however, proved unexpectedly fruitful. In July his documentary project *Blood Relations* – about his Klansman great-grandfather's trial for murder in post-war Alabama – landed him a Creative Capital grant worth $95,000. Two weeks later *Machine Gun or Typewriter?* took the €1,000 top prize at Kosovo's DokuFest, days after its world premiere at Locarno. Wilkerson reckons the film – a lo-fi, compellingly stylised affair which swaggeringly occupies James Ellroy's politically ambiguous territory for unequivocally radical ends – cost $300 tops. How many films have quadrupled their outlay in a heartbeat?

Haunted by the spirits of the doomed Soviet poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and his paramour Lily Brik, *Machine Gun* is a stripped-down love-story unfolding against a Los Angeles where all turf is contested, all political progress is fiercely resisted by reactionary forces, and where broken cemeteries harbour the inspirational ghosts of tormented fellow-travellers (the lovebirds' offbeat trajectory includes a pilgrimage to the grave of Lamed Shapiro, Ukrainian-born Yiddish author of grim pogrom stories, who expired in dire Californian poverty).

The director is the sole performer on view, face hidden behind microphone, as a night-owl pirate-radio DJ recounting this highly enigmatic relationship. Wilkerson himself started broadcasting in 1983 – the year Butte's copper-mines closed, plunging the town into decades of social and environmental decline. A 14-year-old Denver-born Coloradan who had lived in Butte for less than a year, Wilkerson debuted on local college station KMSM (MSM standing for 'Montana School of Mines'). "I became an artist through being a radio DJ," he says. "Probably the whole practice of filmmaking is me trying to be a DJ."

Music has always been a crucial element of Wilkerson's aesthetic, softening his bluntness and providing a counterpoint to all the on-screen text: raucously vibrant Cambodian pop bisects *Distinguished Flying Cross*; *Machine Gun or Typewriter?* uses sepulchral electronica from the underground outfit Gangs; the interpolation of Silver Mt. Zion's 'God Bless Our Dead Marines' in the dying moments of *Who Killed Cock Robin?* transfigures melodrama into something sublime. Wilkerson's speaking voice, as often heard in his narration-heavy films, is by contrast a thing of savage, sardonic urgency. The cumulative impact: difficult to embrace, impossible to ignore.

Union leader Frank Little: *An Injury to One* (2002)

***Machine Gun or Typewriter?* (2015)**

RETRO SPECTRES

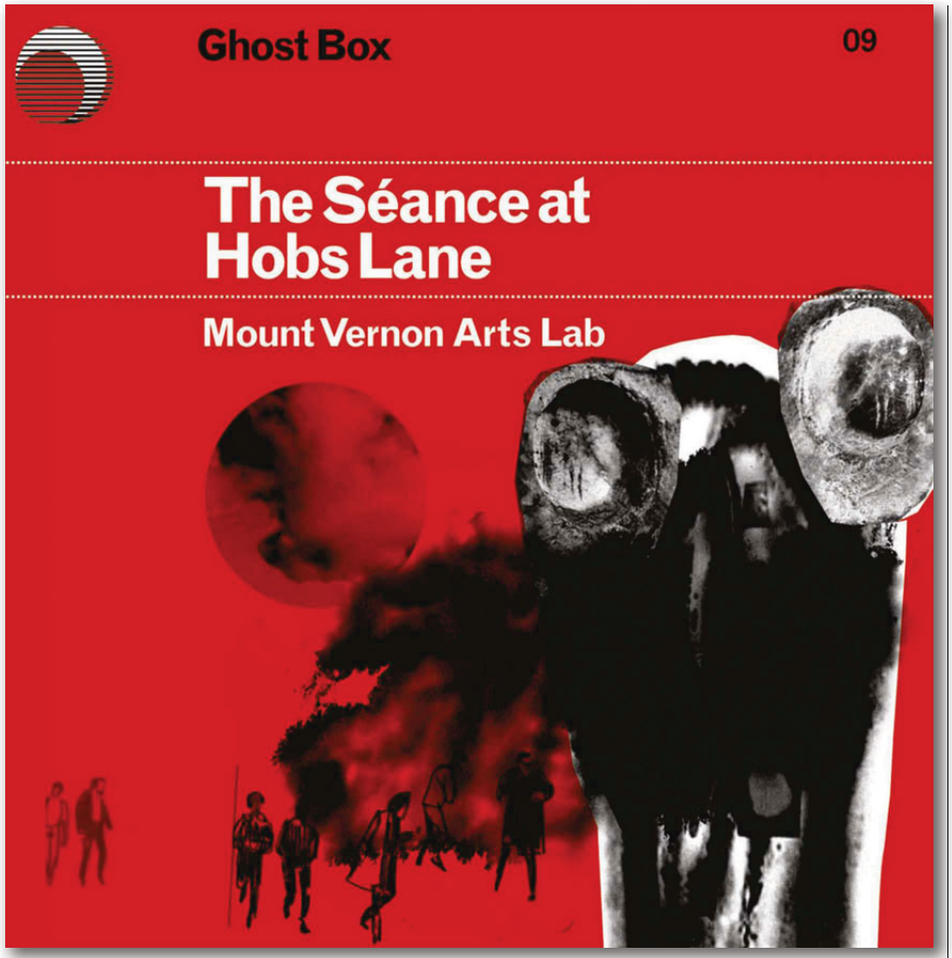
For a decade, the label Ghost Box has been conjuring the phantoms of British horror film. Has the haunting gone on long enough?

By Daniel Barrow

In Roy Ward Baker's 1967 Hammer remake of the BBC serial *Quatermass and the Pit*, the undead consciousness of insectoid Martians haunting Hobbs End Tube station appears first as noise. Tristram Cary's soundtrack renders the powers responsible for centuries of demonic sightings – humanity's own forgotten ancestors – as squealing electronic tones and echoing pulses, which fold into a granular rumbling as Sladden (Duncan Lamont), possessed by these powers' "spiritual evil", collapses in a graveyard, the earth writhing under him. Horror – and here Cary and sound editor Roy Hyde work a variation on the sonic structure of horror film going back to the 1930s – is felt and heard but unseen; imagination, working from the image-bank of primal and forgotten fears, supplies the rest.

This was the principle that underpinned *The Séance at Hobs Lane* by Mount Vernon Arts Lab, a *Quatermass*-inspired record by Glaswegian musician Drew Mulholland. Its reissue in 2007 by the Ghost Box label marked a stage in the evolution of what was already one of the most fascinating British audiovisual projects of the 2000s. Although Ghost Box had not originally released the record, the 53 minutes of abstract, crepuscular rumbling that Mulholland teases from *Quatermass*'s atmosphere slotted perfectly into its catalogue. This suggests what is unique about the label: it has have built up over the last decade a world as heterogeneous, perplexing and coherent as the best of British horror film.

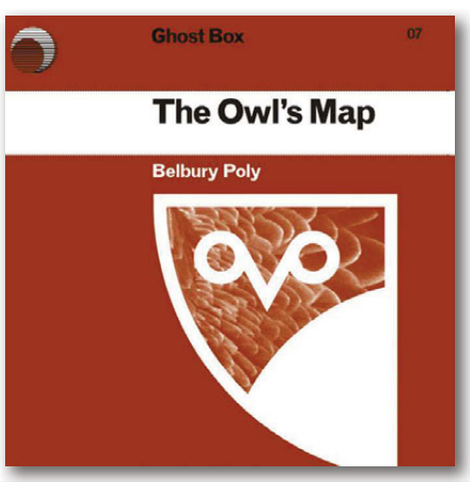
The label has just celebrated its first decade with a new two-disc compilation, *In A Moment... Ghost Box*. It's hard to recapture how strange and opaque Ghost Box's first releases seemed, how puzzling the mix of elements that made up its aesthetic. As Simon Reynolds suggests in his sleevenotes for the new compilation, it was derived largely from the film and television of the 70s childhoods of co-founders Julian House and Jim Jupp (who record as The Focus Group and Belbury Poly respectively): tense pastoral horrors like *The Wicker Man* and *Blood on Satan's Claw*, disturbing, avant-garde children's TV serials such as *The Changes*, *Children of the Stones* and *The Tomorrow People*, ropey pop music shows, public information films that lingered on death and mishap, soundtracked by flutes and lilting synthesisers. (The label's very name evokes audiovisual media – the TV that brought these *unheimlich* spectres into the heart of the home.) The paternalist modernism of BBC schools programmes and Pelican paperbacks – which influenced House's sleeve designs – became braided with the time-warp eeriness that pervades horror films of this period and the innovative electronic soundtracks that flowed through them. Behind the jaunty-but-queasy collages of The Focus Group's *We Are All Pan's People* – whose sleeve recasts the *Top of the Pops* dance troupe as occult Bacchantes – or Belbury Poly's *The Owl's Map* lie not only, say, Daphne Oram's electronic effects for *The Innocents* (1961), Desmond Briscoe's cues for *The Stone Tape* (1972), Krzysztof Komeda's work on Roman Polanski's films of the 60s, or any number of perturbing moments produced by members of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, but the hermetic, inescapable fictional worlds they constituted.



Above and below, some of Julian House's Pelican paperback-influenced sleeve designs

Commentary on early Ghost Box releases emphasised their status as "sonic fictions", to use Mark Fisher's phrase. This wasn't, in retrospect, quite right. Out of sparse visual and sonic traces scattered across the records, House and Jupp created a mythology: the records seemed like the lounge music of an alternative timeline where the post-war consensus never ended, as persistent as the buried presence of the Martians in *Quatermass*... Their power was formal – the uneven, unstable conjunction of sound and vision – rather than purely deriving from their eerie content. They sounded not just like soundtracks

> *The records seemed like the lounge music of an alternative timeline where the post-war consensus never ended*



to imagined films, but revelations of the power of film sound to produce an apparently natural world and then to subvert that naturalness. The modernist grids of House's sleeve designs mirrored the disruptive edits that organised the sampled fragments of The Focus Group's tracks. These formal techniques mirrored the use of sound design in 70s horror to suture the spectator into a shifting world of terrifying suggestion. The strange shifts of The Advisory Circle's *Other Channels* – perhaps the label's best release – in which distant footsteps turn suddenly into up-close synthesiser noise, sampled dialogue switches into distorted screams, could be compared with the razor edits and dreamy sound design, at once dense and spacy, of *A Warning to the Curious* (1972) or the 1971 *giallo A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*. (Giallo, too, forms part of the Ghost Box imaginary, in the bleak synthesisers of Pye Corner Audio, which resemble so many of Dario Argento's soundtracks.)

What distinguishes Ghost Box from its numerous descendants – Public Service Broadcasting, Richard Littler's online project Scarfolk, or Mordant Music's underwhelming *Misinformation* (2012) – is this ability to summon the uncanny resonance from a few talismanic traces and techniques. As Reynolds emphasises, the best Ghost Box releases evoke atmosphere, the indeterminate memory-traces that reanimate a lost world. The threat is always melting back into the greenwood, back into media. In the Ghost Box universe there are no campy vampires; we ourselves are the monsters, living in an age in which, as Ian Penman has written, "technology (from psychoanalysis to surveillance) has made us all ghosts... contaminated by other people's memories."

When Ghost Box began, such films were the preserve of fastidious cults defined by their 'pulp modernist' – to use another phrase of Fisher's – opposition to good taste. Ten years on, they're everyone's property. Horror scholarship has caught up with the British achievement in the 1970s, as has Hollywood – see Neil LaBute's 2006 remake of *The Wicker Man*. When Christopher Lee died last June, the TV tributes endlessly unspooled his Hammer roles and his turn as Lord Summerisle. The mournful retro-modernism to which the label gave a shape has become big business. Hammer has been revived and now produces meta-riffs on its own filmography, as in last year's *The Quiet Ones*. Peter Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio* (2011) – for which House designed the title sequence of the *giallo* on which Toby Jones's sound engineer is working – suggested that the archival trajectory Ghost Box initiated had run its course: a horror film haunted primarily by horror film sound itself, the unstable and too-real world it created, and the repressed history it invoked: the first post-hauntological horror flick. The note of elegy that Strickland sounded – for the horror genre itself and the extremities and subtleties of modernist expression it permitted – suggests what Ghost Box's celebratory mood can't quite admit: that perhaps now the ghosts are all fled in the blinding light of commerce.

***In A Moment... Ghost Box* is available on CD or vinyl from ghostbox.co.uk**

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PRIMAL SCREEN
THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

David Robinson ended his stint as director of the Pordenone silent film festival with a bang

By Brian Robinson

The 34th edition of the Pordenone silent film festival – Le Giornate del cinema muto – offered the customary riches of discovery, rediscovery and great musical accompaniments that characterise the festival. This year's themes – Italian musclemen, the silent films of Victor Fleming, 'Beginnings of the Western', a celebration of the pioneering African-American director and star Bert Williams, early 1930s Soviet silent comedy, and a survey of city symphonies – were served up alongside a lavish helping of new digital restorations of spectacular epics from the world's leading archives and restoration specialists.

The opening night double-bill began with Ernst Lubitsch's *Romeo and Juliet in the Snow* (*Romeo und Julia im Schnee*, 1920), an assured comic take on Shakespeare transposed to an Alpine setting, which included a joyous masked ball and a happy ending. That was followed by *Maciste Alpino* (1916), a deeply impressive take on the Italian muscleman genre starring Bartolomeo Pagano, a huge (in every sense) star with a great line in athletic stunts. This World War I drama, set on the Italian front, high in the eastern Alps, was rushed out to cinemas as propagandist fare: the Austrian enemy are vicious or doltish, the Italians heroic, and at high altitude demonstrate breath-taking mountaineering and rope-climbing skills.

Italian muscle was also represented by Luciano Albertini, a gymnast whose cliff-hanging antics made him a huge international star. In *The Invincible* (*L'invincible Spaventa*, 1927) he played a stage escapologist who becomes unwittingly involved in an attempt to rob a high-class jeweller's; his array of secret weapons included a troupe of 15 female dancers, and the delicious mix of circus, Berlin high life and jewel thieves with dramatic chase scenes made for a rattling good yarn. Carlo Aldini played Achilles in *Helen of Troy* (*Helena – Der Untergang Trojas*, 1924), a lavish and lengthy retelling of Homer, boasting great sets and costumes.

Among several WWI films, none had more impact than the astonishing record of a Chicago cameraman's newsreel trip to Germany in 1915, *On the Firing Line with the Germans* (aka *With Von Hindenburg's Army at the Front/Durborough's [German] War Pictures*). The US was at this point a neutral power and the Germans, eager to enlist American public opinion, cooperated eagerly with Wilbur Henry Durborough. The film, the only full-length documentary made during the war, contains many scenes showing its horrific impact: a group of blind and wounded German soldiers on an excursion by tram in Berlin,

Durborough's film of Germany at war takes us into the action like no other footage of the time

Bull Montana in *When the Clouds Roll By* (1919)

British, French and Russian soldiers in a PoW camp, towns and villages devastated by artillery. The film followed in depth a major campaign against the Russians at the Polish fort of Novo Georgievsk; whether looking down from a plane over a battle in progress, observing the Kaiser on a visit to the front or recording German troops entering Warsaw, Durborough's film takes us into the action like no other footage of the time.

Victor Fleming is remembered mainly for directing credits on *Gone with the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*, but his silents screened here suggest that his lesser known films deserve closer attention. *When the Clouds Roll By* (1919) was a sharp comedy about a sinister doctor conducting an experiment in which he attempts to drive a superstitious young trainee broker, played by Douglas Fairbanks, to suicide. One famous and thoroughly mesmerising dream sequence has Fairbanks walking on the floor, walls and ceiling of a rotating set worthy of Cocteau by way of Keaton. *The Mollycoddle* (1920) – again with Fairbanks – was a compelling story about a foppish Monte Carlo-based playboy forced to rediscover the endurance of his Arizona pioneer forebears in order to put paid to the activities of a diamond smuggler (Wallace Beery) who is terrorising a Hopi village.

Two triumphs of French cinema were presented in great new restorations: Marcel Herbier's dazzling modernist film *The New Enchantment* (*L'Inhumaine* , 1924), with sets by Fernand Léger, its tinting restored in a print which had a brilliant crispness; and my personal festival highlight, all four episodes – 397 minutes – of Henri Fescourt's *Les Misérables* (1926). A wide range of tinting and toning magnified the epic scale of this utterly gripping version of Victor Hugo's novel, featuring a towering central performance by Gabriel Gabrio as Valjean. Pordenone's screening was graced by an equally magnificent piano accompaniment by maestro Neil Brand.

This year's vintage edition marked the end of the 19-year reign of the incomparable David Robinson, whose work as artistic director has inspired generations of archive specialists and film programmers around the world. His popular successor, Jay Weissberg, well-known for his incisive criticism in *Variety*, brings a wealth of knowledge and passion for his subject which should ensure a lively future for this very special festival.

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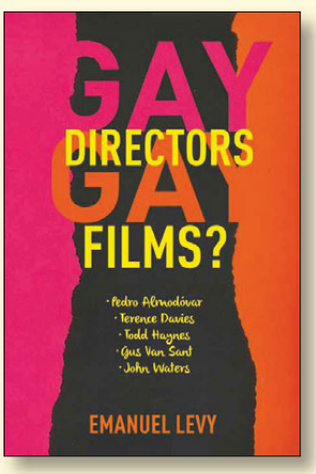

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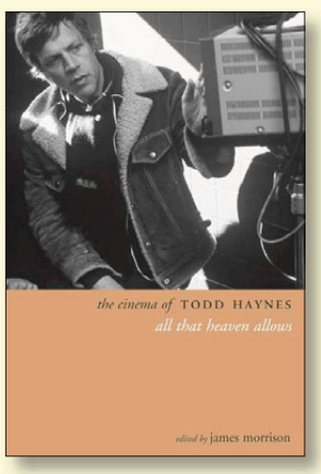

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SENSUOUS ETHNOGRAPHY

Chick Strand's intimate, multilayered, ecstatic films are receiving a rare retrospective at London's Tate Modern this month

By Vera Brunner-Sung

Sensuous, deeply felt, rigorous, uncompromising – the work of Chick Strand belongs in the canon of avant-garde cinema alongside that of her contemporaries Stan Brakhage and Bruces Baillie and Conner. Thanks to recent restorations by the Pacific and Academy film archives, Strand's singular vision is at last becoming more accessible. An in-depth retrospective screens this month at Tate Modern, including fresh prints of films rarely seen outside North America.

As co-founder with Baillie of the 'floating cinematheque' Canyon Cinema in 1961, Strand helped create an audience for experimental filmmakers, which she maintained over 24 years as a professor in Los Angeles. Her own mastery of poetic abstraction, found footage and lyrical ethnography make her filmography one of the most dynamic and distinctive of an era.

An anthropology student who went on to study ethnographic film, Strand is most often associated with work documenting the people she encountered in Mexico, in and around the town of San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato. For years she spent her summers there, always with a 16mm camera in hand: among the many portraits she created before her death in 2009 are *Anselmo* (1967), *Woman of a Thousand Fires* (1978), *Fake Fruit Factory* (1986) and *Señora con flores* (1995/2011). The 1971 film *Mosori Monika*, which considers the relationship between missionaries and native Waraos in Venezuela, exemplifies Strand's signature, intimate style: caressing movements and features in close-up, pulling viewers in with a telescoped lens, incorporating the subject's thoughts via voiceover narration.

Perhaps her most radical work is *Artificial Paradise* (1986), an ecstatic reverie of glimpses and textures that dares to express, as she wrote, "the anthropologist's most human desire". The intimacy of her gaze wants to collapse the distance between filmmaker and subject, outsider and native; the result is a relentless, deeply absorbing visual encounter. It may be that this unapologetic subjectivity played a part in preventing Strand's work being embraced by male-dominated visual anthropology circles, although practitioners such as Robert Gardner and John Marshall managed to push notions of the genre from within. The breadth of her interests went well beyond the specific concerns of the field, however, into film language and poetic forms.

While living in Los Angeles and studying at UCLA, Strand met the filmmaker Pat O'Neill, who encouraged her interest in film stocks and showed her how to solarise film and operate an optical printer. *Angel Blue Sweet Wings* (1966) and *Waterfall* (1967) are early forays with these tools and techniques. The first is a layered poem of landscape, creatures and natural light with a jazz-inflected soundtrack; the second, a deftly synthesised reverie of figure-skaters, retrievers and church towers.

An essay on human suffering: *Cartoon Le Mousse* (1979)

By 1979, the year she completed *Cartoon Le Mousse* and *Loose Ends*, Strand had found her personal voice. These works were ominous, layered essays on suffering and the human condition, reassembling a range of educational, newsreel, cartoon and dramatic films to explore ideas implicit in her ethnographic work: tensions between sensory knowledge and scientific objectivity, fertility and destruction; ideas of gendered experience. Working with found footage enabled another layer of discourse: through repeated depictions of the theatre, film reels and lenses, a contemplation of the medium itself as an epistemological vehicle.

The Tate has programmed *Cartoon Le Mousse* with *Fever Dream* (1979) alongside films by LA-based contemporaries Penelope Spheeris and Chris Langdon (now known as Inga Uwais), aiming to highlight themes of "sexuality, gender and identity". The rapture of *Fever Dream* – a sustained meditation on reflected light that insists on the body, all skin and sensuality – is as much formal as sexual. Like *Kristallnacht* (1979), it offers Strand's voice distilled: the intimacy of physical experience married to light and movement; the essence of vision, the essence of cinema.

Strand's masterpiece is her longest work, the 57-minute *Soft Fiction* (1979). A *tour-de-force* assemblage of first-person interviews, found audio, performances and poetic imagery, *Soft Fiction* presents a series of vivid narratives: a woman trapped in a gang rape describes her pleasure and fear; the story is read on camera by another woman who laughs – amused, titillated, incredulous, or all three. Someone prepares breakfast in the nude as a voice tenderly recalls "making love" as a child with her grandfather, as well as the lasting trauma of incest. Another woman explains, in tight close-up, how she forced herself into a heroin habit to escape an obsessive love affair. Without judgement, Strand juxtaposes these and other accounts of intense physical desire, vulnerability and pain.

Naked breakfast: *Soft Fiction* (1979)

The intimacy of Strand's gaze wants to collapse the distance between filmmaker and subject, outsider and native

It was controversial on release, during a time of factionalised second-wave feminism; it continues to provoke today. *Soft Fiction* troubles the hard distinctions in Western culture between victimhood and pleasure, addiction and control, subject and object, and is itself difficult to categorise: experimental ethnography? Hybrid lyrical documentary? Group portrait? I'd venture that the impulse to categorise is counterproductive. Her work seeks to move us beyond our tendency for reductive reasoning. A feminist ethics permeates her *oeuvre*: a duty to access and interpret female experiences across cultures; a profound embrace of subjectivity; the insistence on embodiment as a way of knowing the world. She was among those filmmakers of the 20th century who disregarded boundaries – who, possessed by the medium's power to represent and transcend, succeeded in creating her own language.

Chick Strand's films are showing at Tate Modern, London, from Friday 13-Sunday 15 November. tate.org.uk

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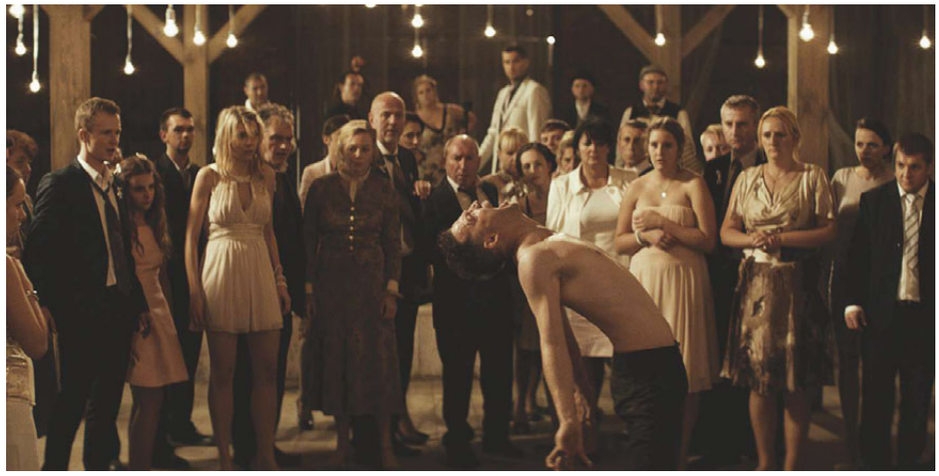
DEMOLITIONS AND DEMONS

Jerzy Skolimowski's latest and the death of young director Marcin Wrona marked this year's Gdynia festival in Poland

By Richard Porton

The Gdynia Film Festival, which this year celebrated its 40th anniversary, has become an important showcase for contemporary and classic Polish cinema. Now in his second year as artistic director, the film scholar Michal Oleszczyk realises that festivals are not merely promotional events but can also function as pedagogical opportunities. Last year, Oleszczyk introduced a new sidebar, Visions Apart – now rechristened the Visions Apart Competition. While the Main Competition included titles by some of the best-known names in Polish cinema, such as Jerzy Skolimowski and Malgorzata Szumowska (whose *Body* won the Golden Lion for Best Film at the Berlinale), Visions Apart aspires to be something like Cannes's Directors' Fortnight, a launching pad for new talent and films that might be considered too edgy for the main competition. It's also refreshing that Gdynia doesn't hesitate to foreground classic Polish cinema: restored prints of films by directors such as Walerian Borowczyk and Edward Zebrowski in the 'Pure Classics' section were among the festival's hottest tickets. As Oleszczyk remarked to me via email, "It was here in Gdynia that a relatively free conversation was being held throughout the years of communism and it was here where everyone could meet and talk about the current tendencies and possible development of the Polish film industry."

It's notable that the most inventive and challenging film in the main competition was directed by a septuagenarian veteran of the Polish New Wave: Skolimowski's *11 Minutes*. Its 'Special Jury Award for an original artistic concept' seemed a grudging tribute to a film that left many viewers nonplussed, but this characteristically high-concept puzzle film functions as a celebration and critique of mainstream film narrative. Each intersecting narrative chronicles a crucial 11 minutes in the lives of protagonists whose schemes go perilously awry. A lascivious American producer's attempt to seduce an actress auditioning for a role proves futile – especially since her possessive husband looms in the background. This parody of a casting-couch scenario is a catalyst for a string of inept ruses and capers: a paedophile hot-dog vendor plies his trade and catches the interest of decidedly impious-seeming nuns; several varieties of ineptitude are captured in the frustrated escapades of a student trying to pull off a robbery and a drug courier whose hedonistic exploits nearly hand him his comeuppance. In a facetious version of one of Griffith's last-minute chase-and-rescue sequences, a team of paramedics must fend off a violent psychotic before coming to the rescue of a pregnant woman and a man in the throes of death.



Possession: Itay Tiran as the haunted bridegroom in Marcin Wrona's *Demon*

While some critics denounced the film as either "nihilistic" or a maze of shaggy dog stories, *11 Minutes* can be viewed as an exuberant distillation of a zany assortment of stock movie climaxes – a canny evisceration of the soothing virtues of 'narrative closure' in cinema. It's also a gleeful riposte to the grating 'We Are the World' sensibility of portmanteau narratives such as Iñárritu's *Babel* and Paul Haggis's *Crash*. Only a filmmaker with a masterful grasp of storytelling could demolish the rudiments of cinematic technique with such panache.

Denounced as nihilistic, '11 Minutes' is a canny evisceration of the soothing virtues of 'narrative closure' in cinema

Marcin Wrona's *Demon*, a much-anticipated competition entry that failed to win any awards, was an ambitious but ultimately unsatisfying stab at reimagining horror film clichés within a historical prism. *Demon* provides a new gloss on the hoary convention of the joyous wedding celebration that slowly descends into chaos. Piotr, the rather colourless protagonist, seems little more than a beaming bridegroom as he returns to rural Poland from England to wed his glowing bride, Zaneta. The wedding party's raucous carousing is up-ended after Piotr makes contact with a mysterious corpse and emerges possessed by the spirit of a young Jewish girl who lived in the village during the Holocaust.

Introducing the Jewish figure of the dybbuk into the usually Christian terrain of the demonic possession movie is provocative, but this allegory of the return of the repressed past is strangely weightless. It is unclear why this particular village is doomed to deal with the consequences of a shameful past, and the plot twist is little more than a gimmick that misfires. These qualms notwithstanding, Wrona's unexpected death towards the end of the festival robbed Polish cinema of one of its most talented young directors.

A new print of Wojciech Has's *How to Be Loved* (1962) delivered a considerably more detailed and resonant evocation of Poland's 20th-century travails. Known for modernist classics such as *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965) and *The Hourglass Sanatorium* (1973), Has demonstrated in this earlier film a talent for nuanced melodrama, dealing compassionately with a woman accused in the aftermath of World War II of collaborationist sympathies. Barbara Krafftówna's performance as the wronged, rueful Felicia is one of the most finely tuned female performances in Polish cinema. The great Zbigniew Cybulski, star of Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*, plays her ungrateful former lover, a man she sheltered from the Nazis during the war. Has's vision is rigorously melancholy – victims and victimisers are equally scarred by the cruel legacies of both Nazism and Stalinism.

Pole dark: Jerzy Skolimowski's baffling, exuberant *11 Minutes*

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Nick James, *Sight & Sound*

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A.O. Scott, *The New York Times*

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Naji Abu Nowar

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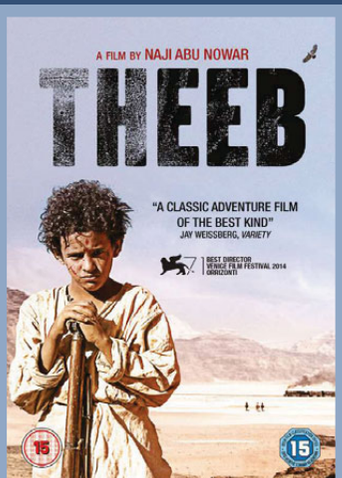

★★★★

'Eye-searing landscapes and a fascinating historical setting turn this tale of innocence lost into a classic adventure film... Truly memorable.'
Trevor Johnston, Time Out

★★★★

'It's classical, muscular storytelling, heart-stoppingly tense at points, and boasts landscapes worth fighting for.'
Guy Lodge, The Standard

Closed Curtain

Jafar Panahi and Kambozia Partovi

Two people barricade themselves In a secluded villa. Are we looking at outlaws, or are they merely phantoms, figments of the imagination of a filmmaker who is no longer allowed to work? Jafar Panahi's second film made whilst under a ban from making films, and co-directed by Kambozia Partovi (who also acts in the film), is a demonstration of the indomitability of artistic endeavour and freedom wrapped in a multi-layered form where illusion and reality change places with dizzying results.

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'... another masterful, multifaceted feature... The journey is often challenging, but the rewards – heady, emotional, provocative and invigorating – are endless.'
Keith Uhlich, Time Out

★★★★

'A riveting meditation on censorship and defiance.'
Bekzhan Sarsenbay, Little White Lies

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Reviews

64 SPECTRE

While taking hard knocks, Daniel Craig's Bond seems to be enjoying himself more – he even allows for the notion Connery and Moore had that the character is aware of his own absurdity and plays up to it

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Substitute father: Idris Elba as the Commandant, the leader of a group of rebel soldiers in an unnamed African country, in Cary Fukunaga's film

Beasts of No Nation

USA/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Cary Joji Fukunaga
Certificate 15 136m 31s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

We hear children chanting a song, and see them playing in a dusty field, their game framed through a screenless television set. "It is starting like this," says the voiceover of young Agu (extraordinary newcomer Abraham Attah), who, with his friend Dike, is trying to sell what he calls his "imagination TV" to anyone who will buy it. He even gets Dike to enact soap-opera and kung fu scenarios in front of it, or poke his head through the set to show off its '3D' capability. Eventually, a sceptical Nigerian peacekeeper 'buys' the TV with food packets, and Agu and Dike move on to another extortionate scam, even as Agu's father wonders why he has a working television without its housing.

That eviscerated TV is an apt metaphor for *Beasts of No Nation*, which presents us with familiar imagery and themes, while removing them from their context. The setting may be an anonymous African country caught up in a vaguely delineated civil conflict, but its war-torn status, the atrocities committed by all sides and the rebels' practice of forcibly recruiting child soldiers are all too easily recognisable by anyone who watches the TV news (or has seen Jean-Stéphane Sauvaire's 2008 film *Johnny Mad Dog*).

These early scenes are important, as they establish the rhythms of a relative normality, and reveal Agu to be a resourceful, imaginative child within a nurturing, supportive home that easily accommodates both his individuality and his unruliness. Yet as government soldiers and rebels converge on Agu's supposedly 'safe' village, the young boy will find himself violently wrenched from those he loves and inducted into the new 'family' of a ragtag guerrilla battalion, where the unnamed 'Commandant' (Idris Elba) is self-appointed 'father' to all under his authority.

Structured around the contrast between Agu's prior home life and his subsequent coming of age in the field, *Beasts of No Nation* is punctuated by different forms of play. At the beginning there are children's joyous games in Agu's hometown; and at the end, as Agu goes through a gradual process of rehabilitation at a UN shelter, he tentatively joins other boys playing football in

War child: Elba with Abraham Attah as Agu, a boy who has been seized from his family by the guerrillas

the surf, cautiously dipping his toe back into childhood in a markedly liminal location. In between, while Agu is with the Commandant, there are games of a decidedly more violent kind: a full-contact football match in the training camp, ending in blows; a high-stakes initiation ritual that requires novice soldiers to run a gauntlet of clubs, with anyone who fails having his throat unceremoniously slit. Even the children's singing that we hear in the opening scene is later converted – and perverted – into war songs.

Beasts of No Nation offers an eyewitness account of war's horrors from one too young to see – let alone participate in – such events. Drawn from the 2005 novel of the same name by Uzodinma Iweala, the film retains some of Agu's first-person narration from the book, including the peculiar syntax and cadence of his words, which are not always easy to make out (and not just because of the noise of combat and the background babble that drown him out). Still, Agu's post-factum voiceover restores a modicum of agency to a character who is otherwise a passive victim along for the infernal ride. This account of the things that happen to Agu is now also his own story in his own words – a story that he can only start telling at the film's end, in the past tense, once he has returned to a semblance of civilisation and begun reclaiming his humanity.

There is a clear contrast here with his best friend among the child soldiers, Strika (another first-time actor, Emmanuel 'King Kong' Nii Adom Quaye), who never speaks, and never leaves the jungle, his muteness both literal and a metaphor for powerlessness. Agu's narration, which regularly comments on events, is also a sign of the boy's future recovery, and so leaves a trail of hope through the film's otherwise despairing trajectory of descent and depravity.

Agu is at once a clinging, desperate child and a cold-eyed, premature adult – and that jarring disjunction is key to why he holds our sympathies

Screenwriter and director Cary Joji Fukunaga, already well known for directing *Sin Nombre* (2009), *Jane Eyre* (2011) and the first series of television's *True Detective* (2014), is here responsible for the cinematography too. He keeps the focus fixed on Agu's immediate experience, even occasionally tingeing the roads, fields and urban landscapes in lysergically filtered colours to reflect the numbing effects of drugs on Agu's perception. Agu's hardening into a combat-ready soldier is expressed through a seamlessly cut montage that shows his humanity chipped away in a trial-by-fire of drilling repetitions and brutalising circumstances. In one particular sequence, the camera snakes its way – at length and without any cuts – through a raided building, tracking Agu, high and traumatised, as he first tries to embrace a terrified woman whom he has mistaken for his mother, and then, after seeing his comrades begin to rape her, shoots her dead himself, before surveying the murder and mayhem taking place in the town below. The sheer technical bravura of this single take embeds and implicates us in the action with Agu at the same time as alienating us from it, and so conveys something of the dissociative nature of his ambivalent rampages. Agu is at once a clinging, desperate child and a cold-eyed, premature adult – and that jarring disjunction is key to why he holds our sympathies even as he does terrible things.

Charismatic, devious, brave and hypocritical, the Commandant cuts a complex figure as Agu's chief, and chief antagonist. As trapped in the militia's chain of command as Agu, he knows that he is caught between a vengeful enemy, a self-serving supreme commander (Jude Akuwudike), the menace of mutiny and a human-rights tribunal. Agu's real father was a community teacher: he finds in the Commandant a paramilitary substitute who gives contradictory lessons in total obedience and eventual, inevitable betrayal, while corrupting fatherhood into abuse and outrage. Fukunaga's film asks if, in so bestial a classroom, it is possible to retain something of one's integrity, if not innocence, and to reframe one's experiences, however horrific, via the imagination and storytelling.

Fukunaga also rewrites the Commandant's end: in Iweala's novel, he is murdered by a new lieutenant, whereas here even Agu, invited by the Commandant himself to pull the trigger, declines, and merely deserts his leader along with the other starving, disgruntled troops. Left to a rough wooden throne in a muddy, empty kingdom, the Commandant shouts after his departing men, "Remember, I will call for you again, and you will come" – words that serve as a pathetic signifier of his deluded self-importance, while also pointing to the likelihood of further trouble down the line. Alive or dead, the Commandant has left deep scars on the traumatised members of his band, and will not easily be exorcised or forgotten.

Beasts of No Nation looks set to pillage the traditional model of film distribution. Bought up by Netflix, it made cinematic history on 16 October as the first feature to be released on the company's global streaming service at the same time as in theatres – prompting four major US exhibitors, worried about the damage wrought to their audience figures and earnings by this loss of exclusivity, to boycott it. Yet it seems entirely in keeping with that opening image – Agu's world through a television set – that this film's constructed realities should be framed all at once for the big and small screens. Imagination fills in the gaps.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Amy Kaufman
Cary Joji Fukunaga
Daniela Taplin Lundberg
Riva Marker
Daniel Crown
Idris Elba
Written for the Screen by
Cary Joji Fukunaga
Based on the book by Uzodinma Iweala
Director of Photography
Cary Joji Fukunaga
Editors
Mikkel E.G. Nielsen
Pete Beaudreau
Production Designer
Inbal Weinberg
Music
Dan Romer
Production Sound Mixer
Geoffrey Patterson
Costume Designer
Jenny Eagan

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Production Companies
Netflix presents a Red Crown production in association with Participant Media, Levantine Films, New Balloon and Mutressa Movies
A Primary Productions and Parliament of Owls production
In association with Mammoth Entertainment and Radicalmedia and Come What May Productions
Executive Producers
Jeff Skoll
Jonathan King
Bill Benenson
Laura Bickford
Fiona Druckenmiller
Jamal Daniel
Donna Gigliotti
Ted Sarandos
Pauline Fischer
Sarah Bowen
Elizabeth Koch
Kristina Kendall
Nnamdi Asomugha
Elika Portnoy
Todd Courtney
Mark Holder
Peter Pastorelli
Uzodinma Iweala
Tommee May

Cast
Idris Elba
Commandant
Kurt Egyiawan
second-in-command
Jude Akuwudike
Supreme Commander
Dada Goodblood
Emmanuel 'King Kong' Nii Adom Quaye
Strika
Abraham Attah
Agu
Ama K. Abebrese
Agu's mother
Kobina Amissah
Sam
Agu's father
Vera Nyarkoah Antwi
Agu's little sister
Richard Pepple
Father Friday
Opeyemi Fagbohungbe
Sergeant Gaz
Emmanuel Affadzi
Dike

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Curzon Film World

An unnamed West African country, present day. As government and rebel forces converge on a 'safe' town, local boy Agu is separated from his fleeing mother, and then sees his father and older brother shot by invading soldiers. Hiding in the jungle, Agu is picked up by a battalion of national NDF rebels led by 'the Commandant', and brutally trained as a recruit. After Agu's first military engagement – a bridge ambush – the Commandant makes him murder a POW with a machete. Over a succession of raids and skirmishes, Agu and the similarly aged Strika become the Commandant's trusted bodyguards – and sexual playthings.

Learning from the NDF's supreme commander that he is to be demoted as part of a political compromise with the UN, the Commandant has his second-in-command (and putative replacement) murdered and goes rogue with his guerrillas, hoping to pillage for profit. In a jungle attack, Strika is shot and killed. Holed up with virtually no munitions or food in a trenched encampment that they are mining for ore, the men mutiny and desert the Commandant. After a tense confrontation with the Commandant, Agu joins them.

Picked up by UN peacekeepers, Agu is taken to a coastal rehabilitation centre for child soldiers, where he begins to open up to a counsellor and play with the other children.

Brooklyn

United Kingdom/Canada/Ireland 2015
Director: John Crowley
Certificate 12A 111m 50s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The Irish expat experience, a poignant mix of aspiration and nostalgia, pervades *Brooklyn*, sensitively adapted by Nick Hornby from Colm Tóibín's 2009 prizewinning novel. Like much of Tóibín's work, it's rooted in the novelist's hometown of Enniscorthy in south-east Ireland, and it's there that the Irish-set sections of the film were shot. (For most of the Brooklyn exteriors, the production moved north of the US-Canadian border, with Montreal standing in for New York City.) Director John Crowley (*Intermission*, *Boy A*) is himself Irish, though he has worked for much of his career in London and New York, and Saoirse Ronan, playing the lead, was born in New York to Irish parents but grew up in the Republic, not far from Enniscorthy, in neighbouring County Carlow. For them, as for most of the Irish members of the cast, the sense of being torn between two – or even more – places must have spoken potently to their personal and inherited memories.

Ronan, who since her breakthrough role in *Atonement* (2007) has scarcely put a foot wrong, gives a subtle, understated performance as Eilis, a young woman who, largely at the instigation of her self-sacrificing older sister, finds herself transported from the gossipy claustrophobia of small-town provincial Ireland to the bewilderingly impersonal hubbub of New York. Time – the early 1950s – is no less crucial here than place, and Crowley's film recreates both faultlessly, in unobtrusively placed detail and in the reproduction of period mores and dialogue. This, we're made constantly aware, was a period when distance counted for a lot more, as did social conformity. Equally well judged is the use of costume, make-up and hairstyling to chart Eilis's growing confidence and sophistication as she overcomes her initial awe of the big brash city and starts to feel at ease in its thronging streets.

This shift in mood and perspective is subtly mirrored by Yves Bélanger's camera. During the opening scenes in Enniscorthy, its moves are cautious, constrained, as if reluctant to draw attention to itself. Once in New York, however, we start to get more of a sweep, a sense of free-and-easy strolling, even in the crowded streets or amid the bustle of Coney Island. And, when back again in Ireland, something of this transatlantic freedom is carried over, while at the same time we're introduced to open vistas – especially in an idyllic episode on a beach – that seemed beyond Eilis's horizons in her previous, more constricted life in her hometown. It's an effect that's further abetted by the texture of the lighting, which moves little by little from subdued to expansive.

Given its plot outline – girl struggles to choose between two attractive men and two ways of life – *Brooklyn* might seem to be verging on Nicholas Sparks or even Mills & Boon territory. That it transcends any such romantic slush puddles is partly thanks to the uniformly excellent casting, but essentially to Hornby and Crowley's fidelity to the spirit of their emotionally complex source material. One or two characters have been slightly softened: in Tóibín's novel, Father Flood, the Irish-American priest who arranges lodging and work for Eilis in Brooklyn, has a touch of asperity underlying his benevolence; there's little of that in Jim Broadbent's performance. And while Julie Walters clearly relishes the sharp-tongued bitchery of Eilis's landlady Mrs Kehoe, presiding over a tableful of flighty, frivolous girls, she's a rather less censorious and oppressive figure than Tóibín makes her. The hint of lesbianism

Welcome to New York: Saoirse Ronan as Eilis Lacey with Emory Cohen as her boyfriend Tony in John Crowley's adaptation of Colm Tóibín's novel

in Eilis's glamorous supervisor at the clothing store where she works (Jessica Paré from *Mad Men*) is downplayed too – the film omits the scene in which she fondles Eilis's bottom under pretext of fitting her for a bathing suit.

That apart, though, the film makes the most of its rich gallery of characters, not least Georgina (Eva Birthistle), the forthright blonde who teaches Eilis how best to survive her emetic transatlantic crossing; Frankie (a scene-stealing James DiGiacomo), her New York boyfriend's outspoken eight-year-old brother; and the gloriously snobby and spiteful Miss Kelly (Brid Brennan), Eilis's one-time employer in Ireland, whose malice precipitates her final decision. And then there are the two boyfriends: in Brooklyn, the gentle, instinctively courteous Tony (Emory Cohen) and, back home in Enniscorthy, the charming, well-spoken Jim (Domhnall Gleeson). This isn't a film that deals in facile good boy/bad boy dichotomies; both young men are sincere, personable and highly attractive, and it's easy to see (as Eilis herself can, all too clearly) that she could be happy with either of them.

In Enniscorthy, the camera's moves are cautious, constrained, as if reluctant to draw attention to itself. Once in New York, we start to get more of a sweep

Her dilemma is all the more stark given that her life in Ireland begins to seem like a full-colour version of the drab black-and-white existence she led before leaving for the States. With her newfound American sophistication and dress sense, she's a figure to admire and envy, a satisfying job is hers for the asking, and young men who previously ignored her are now eager for her company. And then there's her widowed, newly bereaved mother, lonely and longing for her to stay. It says a lot for the filmmakers' skill, and Ronan's performance, that we feel as riven as she does.

The film's most poignant moment comes earlier, though, when on her first Christmas away from home Eilis helps Father Flood serve lunch to a number of ageing Irish expats fallen on hard times. As warmth and alcohol thaw their desolation, one of the old derelicts stands and, in tones of heartfelt purity, sings a song in Erse. In his voice there's all the sweet, aching sorrow of exile.

If the prevailing mood is bittersweet, Crowley and Hornby don't neglect the novel's opportunities for humour. The dinner-table scenes in the Brooklyn boarding house, with Eilis's fellow lodgers competing to outdo each other in cynicism and bitchery until a tart interjection from Ma Kehoe cuts them off, are consistently diverting. As is another dinner-table episode in a rather different register: invited for the first time to meet Tony's Italian-American family, Eilis impresses them with her spaghetti-eating skills – but honesty compels her to admit that she prudently took lessons from one of her fellow lodgers, a half-Italian half-Irish girl.

Domhnall Gleeson and Ronan

And as Miss Kelly, Eilis's employer who runs the snootiest grocery in Enniscorthy, reserving prompt service and the freshest produce for her 'special' (read higher-class) customers, Brid Brennan creates a relishable monster.

In some ways *Brooklyn* feels like a movie that's not just about, but also from, a more innocent age. Though the country to which Eilis emigrates is the America of the Korean War and the Red Scare, we get no hint of those national traumas, and potential racial tensions are defused in the comedy of irrepressible little brother Frankie's announcement, when Eilis arrives at the family apartment, that "the Italians hate the Irish".

But this sidelining of harsher elements is perhaps only to be expected in a film that takes a conventional romantic set-up and, abetted by Michael Brook's hauntingly melodic score, elevates it to a more intelligent dramatic level. Immigrant dramas traditionally tend to be male-led; but *Brooklyn*, despite Cohen's break-out performance and the excellence of Gleeson, is female-led and all the stronger for it. In this, as in most other ways, it's faithful to its source material.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Finola Dwyer
Amanda Posey
Screenplay
Nick Hornby
Adapted from the novel by Colm Tóibín
Director of Photography
Yves Bélanger
Editor
Jake Roberts
Production Designer
François Séguin
Music
Michael Brook
Sound Designer/ Supervising Sound Editor
Glenn Freemantle
Costume Designer
Odile Dicks-Mireaux

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Produced in association with Ingenious, BAI, RTÉ and Hanway Films
A film by John Crowley
Produced with the participation of SODEC Société de développement des entreprises culturelles - Québec
Produced with the financial participation of Crédit d'impôt cinéma et télévision - Gestion SODEC
Produced by Bun and Ham Productions Limited
Funded by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland with the television licence fee
With the support of MEDIA Programme of The European Union
Made in association with RTÉ
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Developed with the support of BBC Films
Executive Producers
Alan Moloney
Christine Langan
Beth Pattinson
Thorsten Schumacher
Zygi Kamasa
Hussain Amarshi

Cast
Saoirse Ronan Eilis Lacey
Domhnall Gleeson Jim Farrell
Emory Cohen Tony Fiorello
Jim Broadbent Father Flood
Julie Walters Mrs Kehoe, 'Ma'
Jessica Paré Miss Fortini
Eve Macklin Diana
Brid Brennan Miss Kelly
Fiona Glascott Rose Lacey
Jane Brennan Mary Lacey
Nora-Jane Noone Sheila
Jenn Murray Dolores
Eva Birthistle Georgina
Michael Zegen Maurizio

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Enniscorthy, County Wexford, 1950. Eilis Lacey, who is in her early twenties and studying bookkeeping, lives with her widowed mother and her older sister Rose. Jobs are scarce but she works on Sundays in Miss Kelly's grocery store. Father Flood, an expat Irish priest, arrives from New York and suggests that he can find work and lodging for Eilis in Brooklyn. Despite some misgivings, she agrees to go, and sails from Cork. After an unpleasant crossing, Eilis is met by Father Flood, who takes her to Mrs Kehoe's boarding house. She starts work in Bartocci's clothing store and takes night classes in bookkeeping.

At first Eilis is overwhelmed by the tumult of New York, but gradually she becomes used to it, despite occasional bouts of homesickness. At an Irish dance, she meets a young man called Tony, who is gentle and good-looking. He confesses that he's not Irish, but Italian. He takes Eilis home to meet his family, who welcome her warmly. Eilis and Tony's mutual attraction grows. However, news comes from Ireland that Rose has suddenly died, and Eilis tells Tony that she must return home for a while to comfort her mother; he fears she won't come back. They sleep together, then marry in secret in a register office.

Back in Enniscorthy, people are impressed by Eilis's newfound sophistication. Finding her mother lonely and distressed, Eilis extends her stay, starts covering for Rose's old job and is courted by Jim, a charming young man from a well-off family. Increasingly tempted to stay, she puts off answering Tony's letters. Miss Kelly summons her and tells her that a mutual acquaintance saw her marrying Tony. Realising where her future lies, Eilis returns to New York.

Bedtime stories: Klara Kristin plays Omi (lighting a cigarette), the girl next door who comes between Electra (Aomi Muyock) and Murphy (Karl Glusman)

'Love'

France/Brazil/Belgium 2015
Director: Gaspar Noé
Certificate 15 135m 12s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The very notion of arch provocateur Gaspar Noé even sitting through 1970's marshmallow romance *Love Story* raises a smile, but it's very possible that the famous poster tagline might rather chime with him. "Love means never having to say you're sorry" ran the ad campaign for Ryan O'Neal and Ali MacGraw's death-haunted box-office amours, and there's definitely a sense that Noé's latest *magnum opus*, a love story brandishing its authentic boners like a badge of honour and ejaculating with pride all over our 3D glasses, is as unrepentant as the rest of his controversy-courting oeuvre.

Just how much of its story about an aspiring young filmmaker heartbroken by a passionately sexual relationship is autobiographical we may never know, but Noé's prints are all over *'Love'* – not just in the formal trademarks such as the blink-to-black transitions and the colour filters creating a spectrum of moods for the sundry erotic encounters, but also in the way the young American expat protagonist borrows the director's mother's family name, Murphy, has the Love Hotel model from *Enter the Void* (2009) plonked in the midst of his Paris apartment, and christens his son Gaspar. Oh, and for extra measure, Noé himself pitches up, beneath an outrageously synthetic salt-and-pepper wig, as the smug art gallery owner with a lingering place in the affections of master Murphy's main squeeze Electra. The self-referentiality is blatant enough to raise a laugh, but we take the point that all this is very close to Noé's heart.

Maybe too close for him to have any distance from it. That's the conclusion after 135 minutes of wearyingly trite improv dialogue and key performances that meet the project's physical demands but fall woefully short on observational credibility, lacking the basic charisma to lend a smidgen of soul to the life-changing events the characters are supposedly going through. The realities of the industry mean that a film demanding authentic sexual activity would be too much of a risk for actors with an existing career profile, but Karl Glusman's Murphy, Aomi Muyock's Electra and Klara Kristin as Omi, the girl-next-door who eventually comes between the young lovers (literally and figuratively), all appear to have been left to their own devices. Even for non-professionals, they're barely adequate with their clothes on, unfortunately recalling that far-off era of beards and bush when porn movies had plotlines and reel changes. As a drama we might emotionally invest in, *'Love'* is simply dead in the water as soon as we realise we're stuck with this lot for the duration.

And, actually, that gives us time to ponder what the film might have been if it were remotely effective. A stray line during a party scene, where one guest bemoans the absence of "sentimental sensuality" on our cinema screens, points up Noé's avowed intent to break down the barriers between mainstream cinema and the explicit sexual content of pornography – an arena whose transgressive allure still seemingly carries with it shame and stigma despite its online popularity. A film exploring the relationship between our sexual selves and our lives' emotional trajectories with unabashed openness may be a healthy thing, even if Catherine Breillat, Michael Winterbottom and Lars von Trier have already been down this avenue with varying degrees of candour. *'Love'*, though, proves uneven in its efforts to make the persistent physical throb as much of a salient point in the storyline as the characters' sentimental connections. Murphy and Omi's first time together is an extended sexual encounter that gets its genuine due, given even more heat by Eddie Hazel's blistering guitar solo from Funkadelic's 'Maggot Brain'. It's a rare instance of the physical element truly intensifying the story arc – the other being when Murphy and Omi's overenthusiastic illicit fuck session results in a broken condom and grave consequences for all involved.

Elsewhere, however, the sex merely echoes the emotional tenor of Murphy and Electra's increasingly fractious relationship, and since it's not setting the story agenda any more, it becomes stale and repetitive. Noé might argue that this is actually the point, and to be fair he does alter lighting and music selections to

Noé's latest opus, a love story brandishing its boners like a badge of honour and ejaculating with pride all over our 3D glasses, is as unrepentant as the rest of his oeuvre

try to outline a certain distinctive tonality for each sexual sequence. For a visit to a swingers' club, for instance, he creates an infernal vision bathed in dark crimson, throbbing to the doomy analogue synth tones of John Carpenter's *Assault on Precinct 13* (1976). The basic issue, though, is that the obviously limited performances and dialogue inhibit the viewer's involvement in the story, so the umpteenth shagging set piece becomes even more devoid of meaning. That's unfortunate for Noé, in a way, because the depiction of the sex does come from an attempt to portray it as an expression of feeling, calibrating the degrees to which the lovers give or take pleasure depending on their changing emotional circumstances, and it certainly eschews genuine porn's dedication to arousal and the ruthless close-up exploitation of its performers' physical attributes. Still, what *'Love'* doesn't do is lend its encounters any wider resonance beyond the self-involved microcosm of its *ménage à trois*. Some 40 years on, we're still waiting for another film to make its full-on coupling mean as much as it did in Oshima's *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), in which the lovers' freedom with their own bodies played out against a political climate of enveloping authoritarian conformity.

Moreover, while Noé's previous offerings, love them or loathe them, are rooted in an ardent faith in cinema's ability to take viewers to places they would never otherwise go – within a landscape of violence and psychosis in *I Stand Alone* (1998) and *Irreversible* (2002), or indeed an extended out-of-body experience in *Enter the Void* (2009) – in this instance he's banked on 3D technology to deliver a similarly transformative and immersive effect, and it hasn't completely worked. His approach is to keep Murphy front and centre of the frame so that there's a clear spatial demarcation between him and the background, whether he's mooching in his flat or more impressively traversing the passageways of Père Lachaise cemetery. Once he hits the sack with Electra or Omi, however, the lovers are flat against the bed, so that sense of spatiality is lost, and the headline-grabbing upfront cumshot (arguably a gratuitous moment unjustified by its connection to the storyline) proves a rather desperate effort to get back to what 3D does best – sticking pointy things in your face.

Doubtless stymied by its own lack of dramatic heft, *'Love'* is the tamest, least impactful offering of Noé's career. Yet for all its myriad flaws, it can't be completely dismissed, since its utterly uningratiating protagonist Murphy offers a portrait of phallocentric masculinity that's quite startlingly unflattering. "A dick has no brain," he muses, and certainly he sees the women in his life as objects existing for his gratification, remaining wholly uninterested in their feelings or desires, and indeed fiercely aggressive should they try to pursue them. He surrounds himself with posters of great filmmakers while seemingly lacking any creative spark himself, hiding a festering sense of worthlessness behind the macho facade of a man who utterly resents his current partner and their child, dreaming instead of recapturing the selfish thrills of the great sex he had with his ex.

Whether the film is holding this guy up as an example of manhood at its worst or asking for understanding for the frustrations he's going through is, disappointingly, never really made clear. It is possible, though, to read it as a revelation of a brutal inner core, done with a sort of kamikaze honesty that's at some remove from the frequently contrived posturing of Noé's previous filmography. Maybe *'Love'* means he's saying sorry after all. S

Soap opera: Murphy sobs over his lost love Electra

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Gaspar Noé
Edouard Weil
Vincent Maraval
Brahim Chioua
Rodrigo Teixeira
Script
Gaspar Noé
Image
Benoît Debie
Editing
Gaspar Noé
Denis Bedlow
Art
Samantha Benne
Sound
Ken Yasumoto
Styling
Omaima S.

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Production Companies
A film produced by Les Cinémas de la Zone, Rectangle Productions, Wild Bunch, RT Features
In association with Scope Pictures
With the participation of Canal+
The support of the CNC (New Technologies in Production) and the Tax Shelter of Belgium
Executive Producers
Serge Catoire
Sophie Mas
Lourenço Sant'Anna

Cast
Aomi Muyock
Electra
Karl Glusman
Murphy
Klara Kristin
Omi
Ugo Fox
Gaspar
Juan Saavedra
Julio
Aron Pages
Noé
Isabelle Nicou
Nora
Benoît Debie
Yuyo
Vincent Maraval
Castel
Déborah Révy
Paula
Xamira Zuloaga
Lucile
Stella Rocha
Mama
Omaima S.
Victoire

In Colour [2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Curzon Film World

France, present day. Murphy is an expat American and aspiring filmmaker living in Paris. He wakes up with a hangover on New Year's Day. His partner Omi and their young son Gaspar get on his nerves, since he was having a very pleasant dream about making love to his old girlfriend Electra. The latter's mother then calls him out of the blue: she hasn't heard from her daughter in months and is worried that she's committed suicide. While Omi and Gaspar go out for the day, Murphy remains in the flat, assailed by memories of his time with Electra, from chance meeting to passionate sex.

We learn how Murphy's intense possessiveness creates tensions when Electra continues to see her ex-boyfriend, a successful gallery owner whom Murphy attacks during a party. He ends up at the police station, where the sympathetic inspector recommends the couple visit a swingers' club to take carefree pleasure in sex. Murphy remains intensely jealous as he sees Electra aroused by other men. They befriend new neighbour Omi, and have three-way sex with her. Murphy now starts seeing Omi on the side, and a split condom leaves her pregnant.

Now, years later, Murphy is clearly embittered by his experiences, though he makes little progress in tracing Electra's movements before Omi and Gaspar return. Crying in the bath, Murphy reflects on his parental responsibilities – but his strongest bond is with the lost Electra, whom he imagines still there with him.

Plane sailing: for all its wayward plotting, Sam Mendes's *SPECTRE* works, with a parade of imaginative action sequences and some lush cinematography

SPECTRE

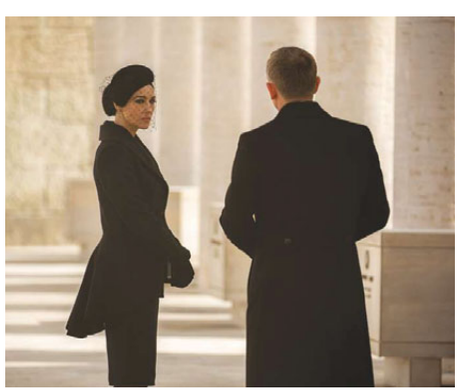
Director: Sam Mendes
Certificate 12A 147m 58s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Daniel Craig's first three films as 'Ian Fleming's James Bond 007' – *Casino Royale* (2006), *Quantum of Solace* (2008) and *Skyfall* (2012) – constitute a reinvention of the venerable spy franchise for the 21st century. This new entry, directed by *Skyfall* holdover Sam Mendes, pulls together plotlines from all three films to set in motion what might be seen as Craig's first routine assignment as Bond.

Casino Royale, which went back to Fleming's first novel for its plot and general air of ruthlessness, showed Bond on his way to becoming the emotionally numbed, super-competent gambler/detective-cum-assassin hero through a clash with his first significant villain, Le Chiffre (Mads Mikkelsen, whose image pops up here along with other faces from the past), and the loss of Vesper Lynd (Eva Green), the woman who touched then hardened the philanderer's heart. Fleming reworked this trauma in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* by having Bond fall in love again and get married, only for his arch-nemesis Blofeld to murder the bride just after the wedding. The films didn't quite get this arc right, making *You Only Live Twice* (1967) before *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969), so that Bond seemed to take vengeance *before* the outrage that made his crusade personal; the series' first change of lead actor also isolated the murder of Mrs Bond from the ongoing character arc.

With Craig, the series has not repeated that error: the loss of Vesper still haunts this version of Bond. Four films – and one Olympic opening ceremony cameo – later, he shudders to find a VHS cassette of her interrogation in the abandoned office of Mr White (Jesper Christensen), last survivor of the Quantum plot that wove through *Casino Royale* and *Quantum of Solace*. *Skyfall* then delved deeper into Bond's past than any other film, and had him confront some of the issues responsible for traits of Fleming's character (self-hating, alcoholic womanising and suicidal recklessness) which most film Bonds have done without. In blowing up his childhood home and killing his twisted doppelganger Silva (Javier Bardem), Craig's version of the hero could purge these elements from his make-up, enabling the series to continue without Bond spiralling into the despair of Fleming's last, amazingly dark novels. Though memories linger, Craig is here jauntier and lighter on his feet and sometimes might even be thinking about making those post-enemy's-death quips that have been phased out on his watch.



Death and the maiden: Monica Bellucci and Craig

Having developed a Bond in line with Fleming's thrill-seeking burned-out case, *SPECTRE* is determined to have more fun with him. Flashes of the high-living, hard-loving Bond of the earliest films and Fleming's mid-

period novels were allowed in the earlier Craig films, but here they are set free. While taking hard knocks, Craig's Bond seems to be enjoying himself more – he even allows for the notion Connery and Moore had that the character is aware of his own absurdity and plays up to it. He shoots prospective assassins with panache, finally gets the hang of outlandish spy gadgets (including a classic car accessory and a watch with a "very loud" alarm) and allows himself to be enraptured by passing beauties in a manner that even pokes sly fun at his morbid strain of erotomania (he picks up Monica Bellucci at the funeral of her husband, whom he killed).

In the ongoing plot, Quantum, who were (in a modish for 2006-08 touch) super-evil bankers, has evolved into SPECTRE (a 60s revival, introduced in the novel *Thunderball* and the film *Dr. No*). In a neat circularity, the octopus-logoed purveyors of surveillance tech to all comers are fomenting acts of false-flag terror to persuade nation-states to invest in more and more spying. Again, there's a sense of headlines being skimmed for subtext. M's smarmy, ambitious superior C (Andrew Scott, Moriarty from the BBC's *Sherlock*) wants to discontinue 'the 00 programme' in favour of drones and satellites. Even the arch-spymaster M – Ralph Fiennes is interestingly less manipulative, more direct than Judi Dench – has qualms about what this means for democracy and public service. The film almost criticises current government policies, M expressing distrust of the private finance initiative that has enabled C to move out of the edifice Silva bombed in *Skyfall* into a modish glass-and-steel structure (all that glass is eventually one major villain's downfall). The best-timed quip in the film comes when tables are finally turned in this sub-plot and Fiennes concludes "Now we see what C stands for... careless."

Whether taken as the fourth entry in a decade-old series or the 24th in the saga which began with *Dr. No* (1962), *SPECTRE* faces the tension between a need to innovate and a requirement to keep on track. The accumulation of backstory means some obligatory developments verge on the ridiculous. One of the subtler cruelties the arch-baddie (Christoph Waltz) inflicts on Bond is that he lets the hero's current love interest – Léa Seydoux, given the peculiarly Proustian character name Madeleine Swann – read up on what happened to his last four girlfriends (like his surrogate mother, all were murdered in previous films). Seydoux's narrow-eyed doubt is her best moment in a film that rather short-changes its female characters. Though she won few fans at the time, it now seems that Craig's most effective previous female partner (significantly, not a romantic one) was Olga Kurylenko's vengeful Camille in *Quantum of Solace*, who wisely stayed out of his bed and heart and consequently got out of their adventure alive. Meanwhile, Naomie Harris, who took up Moneypenny's thankless job in *Skyfall*, has to jostle for attention with Ben Whishaw's Q stealing every scene he's in (Q seems to flirt with Bond even more than Moneypenny does), Fiennes showing his own brand of posh British toughness and Rory Kinnear, who's around to provide extra exposition.

Short-changed: Léa Seydoux as Madeleine Swann

Having developed a Bond in line with Fleming's thrill-seeking burned-out case in the early Craig films, SPECTRE is determined to have more fun with him

Recent Bonds have tended to place the gunsight pose in the end credits. This one opens with the iconic image, then segues to the Day of the Dead in Mexico City via a long-held shot of 007, in and out of a skeleton suit, pursuing a villain through the throng, in, out and over buildings. The breathtaking manner evokes the similarly Latin American-themed stand-out shots of *Touch of Evil* (1958) and *The Secret in Their Eyes* (2009). The action is stalled briefly by one of the weakest ever theme songs, and the audience's patience gets tested by two and a half hours of set-pieces strung on one of the series' thinner plots. Waltz is a star-turn villain, who gets a white cat and (eventually) a scar to match Donald Pleasence's in *You Only Live Twice*, but his monomania actually hinders SPECTRE's larger scheme. In the end, the villain's automated torture chair (exactly the sort of contraption Le Chiffre sneered at in *Casino Royale*) and Joker-like giggly fixation on the hero are less of a threat to freedom than manpower cuts and policy changes in the intelligence services.

Nevertheless, for all its wayward plotting (including an unhelpful tie-in with Bond's childhood that makes very little sense) and off-the-peg elements, *SPECTRE* works. It has a parade of imaginative action sequences, the lush cinematography of Hoyte Van Hoytema (of *Let the Right One In*, ably replacing Roger Deakins's stellar *Skyfall* turn), spectacular locations (a mountaintop clinic after the manner of Blofeld's lair in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, a SPECTRE base in a Tunisian meteor crater), superb costuming (Craig gets a white tuxedo and Seydoux a classic pale blue gown for their North African interlude) and Craig's perfect cocktail of grit and charm.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael G. Wilson
Barbara Broccoli
Screenplay
John Logan
Neal Purvis
Robert Wade
Jez Butterworth
Story
John Logan
Neal Purvis
Robert Wade

Director of Photography
Hoyte van Hoytema
Editor
Lee Smith
Production Designer
Dennis Gassner
Music
Thomas Newman
Sound Recordist
Stuart Wilson
Costume Designer
Jany Temime
Stunt Co-ordinator
Gary Powell

Executive Producer
Callum McDougall

Cast
Daniel Craig
James Bond
Christoph Waltz
Franz Oberhauser
Léa Seydoux
Madeleine Swann
Ben Whishaw
'Q'
Naomie Harris
Eve Moneypenny
Dave Bautista
Mr Hinx
Monica Bellucci
Lucia Sciarra
Ralph Fiennes
'M'
Andrew Scott
Max Denbigh, 'C'
Rory Kinnear
Tanner
Jesper Christensen
Mr White
Stephanie Sigman
Estrella

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

Mexico City, the present. James Bond, acting on a posthumous tip-off from the former M, thwarts a terrorist plot and kills Marco Sciarra, agent of SPECTRE, the international cartel behind a series of threats to the world and personal attacks on the British secret agent. In London, the new M struggles against the incorporation of MI5 into a surveillance-based multi-national espionage outfit commanded by technocrat Max Denbigh. Suspended from duty because of rogue activities, Bond has to investigate on his own. Attending Sciarra's funeral in Rome, he seduces the dead man's widow and discovers that the head of SPECTRE is Franz Oberhauser – his psychopathic foster-brother, long thought dead and now using the name Blofeld. M, Q and Moneypenny – Bond's MI5 associates – covertly help Bond, leading him to Mr White, an old foe and SPECTRE renegade who has been poisoned by Blofeld. Before killing himself, White suggests Bond talk with his daughter, Dr Madeleine Swann, who runs a clinic in Austria and asks the spy to protect her from their mutual enemies. Bond rescues Madeleine from SPECTRE hit man Mr Hinx. She takes him to Tunisia, where her father has left clues that lead them to SPECTRE's desert base. Blofeld tortures Bond, who escapes with Madeleine's help and blows up the facility. In London, M realises that Spectre is behind Denbigh. Q thwarts a global surveillance coup and M kills Denbigh. Blofeld wires Madeleine – with whom Bond has become emotionally involved - to a bomb in MI5's derelict old HQ, but Bond rescues her and captures the villain.

Between Two Worlds

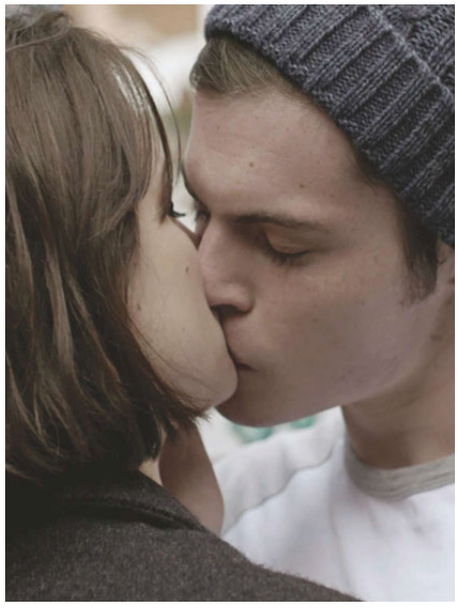
United Kingdom 2015
Director: James Marquand
Certificate 15 98m 41s

Reviewed by Tim Hale

Although it's the kind of occasion for which the term faint praise was invented, *Between Two Worlds* makes at least some effort to divert from the more dire aspects of that dreaded concept, the urban British youth film. Its three upwardly mobile London-based bros – Liverpudlian writer Ryan (Chris Mason), something-in-the-City John (Elliot Gleave) and beautiful young celeb Connor (Lucien Laviscount) – navigate life in Coalition Britain without picking up the full accumulated fluff of a Richard Curtis morality tale or the dead-head profanity of any number of recent explorations of the class divide. But it's a close-run thing.

Everyone here is an archetype of some sort, though within those limits the film seems prepared to put politics nearer to the fore than usual. Exactly why Ryan's first novel caused his nan to say that he had brought shame on his family isn't clear, but class struggle was clearly involved. Love interest Anna (a sparky Hannah Britland) calls him "a little Che" – but she sits higher up the social tree, a gallery owner with an appreciation of self-improvement, and their relationship echoes other stories of cheeky northern lads scoring with posh southern girls.

The trouble really starts once the title of Ryan's book is revealed to be *The Boy with the Thorn in His Side*, which can't help but be loaded with outside associations, bringing a level of indulgence the film struggles to handle without looking smug. The tone from then on wavers between narrative happenstance, over-syrupped sentiment and creaking character business involving men saying out loud that they don't know who they are any more. John carries the freighted surname of Moriarty for no particular reason, while the film director who catches the eye of Connor's girlfriend on the other side of the world is apparently called Dermott Cashmore. Meanwhile the tangled nest of relationships is agitated so manipulatively that the results could have been authentic farce if only the jokes were a bit funnier. Director James Marquand (son of Richard) arranges a party at which the writer is seduced by the wife just as the husband fights with the businesswoman who leaves in time for the actor who has partied with the ex to walk in before the door has swung closed. The only thing lacking is the vicar.



London's yearning: Hannah Britland, Chris Mason

The invitation to chart these characters' paths in political terms is clear long before we meet Ryan's dad Joe (Mark Womack), whose days on a soapbox can hardly be unrelated to their estrangement. John's ejection from the collapsing dream world of global finance – "Shit's kicking off at work," he moans – lasts roughly 60 seconds before his affluent film-star friend throws him a lifeline; Anna, meanwhile, heads for New York to work for an Occupy offshoot and change the world, with Ryan following in her wake like a newly empowered puppy. His London goal, rather revealingly, was to write something "aspirational not miserable", which is as succinct a New Labour credo as you are likely to hear. He junks it and puts Britain in the rear-view mirror. They all do. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Pete Gibbons, Stephen Morris
Written by Stephen Morris
Director of Photography Stuart Nicholas White
Film Editor Stephen Shone
Production Designer Paul Briggs
Sound Recordist Paul Nolan
Costume Designer Hannah Monkley
©Thorn in Your Side Films Limited
Production Company Formidable
Executive Produced by Iain McKeand
Executive Producers Paul Hampson, John Hughes, Annabel Carter, Scott Dann, Phil Evers

Cast
Chris Mason Ryan Stephenson
Hannah Britland Anna Buckland
Lucien Laviscount Connor Matthews
Charlie Anson Freddie
Mark Womack Joe Stephenson
Monica Lopera Suzannah
Elliot Gleave John Moriarty
Wallis Day Lucy
Molly Taylor Josie Stephenson

In Colour [2.35:1]
Distributor Formidable

London, the present. While struggling to start his second novel, writer Ryan socialises with two friends – John, who works in the City, and Connor, a young actor who is frequent tabloid fodder. Ryan pines for his ex-girlfriend Lucy. At a party held by his increasingly insistent agent Freddie, Ryan meets Anna, the owner of an art gallery; they are attracted to each other but Ryan later sleeps with Freddie's wife Suzannah. Meanwhile Connor suspects that his actress girlfriend Emily might be involved with her director while filming in Los Angeles. Anna and Ryan grow closer; she admires his first novel, and he tells her of the working-class upbringing in Liverpool that lay behind it, and of the stress it caused in his family. He is unaware, however, that Anna once had a one-night stand with Freddie. Connor, increasingly depressed, has a drunken fling with Lucy, which leads to a rift with Ryan.

The various relationships are revealed, causing Anna to leave Ryan and make plans to go to New York, while Ryan returns to Liverpool to see his sick father and reconcile with his family. John loses his job when his company folds, leaving him broke. Connor takes him on as his assistant on the film he has just been offered in Hollywood – but first the pair help Ryan catch Anna's plane.

Black Mass

USA/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Scott Cooper
Certificate 15 122m 38s

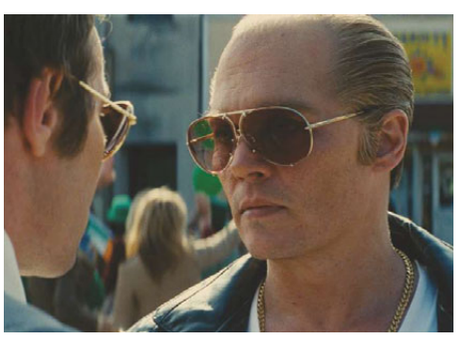
Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The Irish South Boston of infamous crime boss James J. 'Whitey' Bulger and his Winter Hill Gang is basically parochial, a solar system whose radiating concentric circles are the block, the parish, the Old Colony and the Old Country, a place where a local code of *omertà* keeps outsiders at bay. The best movies about Boston – I'll include John Ford's *The Last Hurrah* (1958), Richard Fleischer's *The Boston Strangler* (1968), Peter Yates's *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973), William Friedkin's *The Brink's Job* (1978), Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River* (2003) and Martin Scorsese's *The Departed* (2006) – all give the sense of having been made with intel from an inside man, as in most cases they were. Ford, for example, was a son of Irish New England, while *Coyle* hews closely to a source novel by George V. Higgins, then an Assistant United States Attorney in Boston, who knew whereof he spoke – it is widely speculated that Dillon, the character played by Peter Boyle in Yates's film, was based on none other than Bulger, still very much at large at the time.

While *Coyle* was street-level reportage, *Black Mass* is a throwback, catering to collective nostalgia for a time when crime was still controlled by blue-collar white immigrant enclaves, though the film daintily tiptoes around the racial animus that drew them together all the more tightly. The screenplay is credited to a Midwesterner and an Englishman, and exhibits no grasp of Bostonian vernacular beyond a half-arsed usage of 'wicked' and references to the Red Sox.

The director is Scott Cooper, who seemingly a lifetime ago managed to transcribe convincingly the feeling of the second-tier south-western honky-tonk milieu in *Crazy Heart* (2009) but who is entirely out of his depth here. His movie is an undifferentiated parade of low-key-lit medium close-ups, occasionally enlivened by people being shot in the head while sitting in boxy period cars. (Exteriors are usually out of focus or directed towards open water, so as to keep the contemporary Subways out of shot.) An Anglo-American-Australian cast that includes Joel Edgerton as Bulger's FBI contact Connolly and Kevin Bacon as one of his office higher-ups seem to have a betting pool going as to who can most mangle a Boston brogue beyond all recognition, in which case Benedict Cumberbatch, playing state senator brother Billy Bulger, wins in a walk-off.

The main event, however, is the film's Bulger – Johnny Depp, now on the far side of 50 and modifying his approach as a leading man as time



Public enemy: Johnny Depp

blunts his bladelike cheekbones. Here he is pale and scaly, with sandy, thinning hair, ice-blue eyes, a dead tooth and a funereal air, the creak of his ominous delivery matched by that of his omnipresent leather jacket. Depp's depthless Bulger is as much a makeup-chair monster as any of his parts for Tim Burton, making no pretext of realism. One almost wishes that the rest of the movie had conformed to this theatrical Max Schreck approach, rather than draping the proceedings in adumbral high seriousness, a tight-arsed puritanical Protestant approach to this particularly Irish Catholic subject.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
John Lesher
Brian Oliver
Scott Cooper
Patrick McCormick
Tyler Thompson
Screenplay
Mark Mallouk
Jez Butterworth
Based on the book by Dick Lehr, Gerard O'Neill
Director of Photography
Masanobu Takayanagi
Edited by
David Rosenbloom
Production Designer
Stefania Cella
Music
Tom Holkenborg
Supervising Sound Editors
Mark Mangini
Byron Wilson
Costume Designer
Kasia Walicka Maimone

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Production Companies
Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with Cross Creek Pictures & RatPac-Dune Entertainment a Cross Creek Pictures production in association with Le Grisbi Productions, Free State Pictures and Head Gear Films A Scott Cooper film Financed in association with Vendian Entertainment
Executive Producers
Brett Ratner
James Packer
Steven Mnuchin
Peter Mallouk
Ray Mallouk
Christopher Woodrow
Brett Granstaff
Gary Granstaff
Phil Hunt
Compton Ross

Cast
Johnny Depp
James 'Whitey' Bulger
Joel Edgerton
John Connolly
Benedict Cumberbatch
Billy Bulger
Dakota Johnson
Lindsey Cyr
Kevin Bacon
Agent Charles McGuire
Peter Sarsgaard
Brian Halloran
Jesse Plemons
Kevin Weeks
Rory Cochrane
Stephen Flemmi
David Harbour
John Morris
Adam Scott
Agent Robert Fitzpatrick
Corey Stoll
Fred Wyshak
Julianne Nicholson
Marianne Connolly
W. Earl Brown
John Martorano
Bill Camp
John Callahan
Juno Temple
Deborah Hussey
Luke Ryan
Douglas Cyr

Dolby Digital
In Colour
Colour by
DeLuxe
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

Boston, the recent past. Former members of James J. 'Whitey' Bulger's Winter Hill Gang give state's evidence testimony about his rise to power in the 1970s and 1980s, which is seen in flashback.

Bulger's Irish-American mob is at war with the Italian Mafia, which is run in Boston by the Angiulo brothers. FBI agent John Connolly, who grew up in the Boston housing projects with Bulger and his brother Billy, now a state senator, approaches him about a deal: in exchange for information on the Angiulos, Bulger will be allowed to continue his operations out in the open. The Angiulos are arrested. Unopposed, Bulger's operation becomes the largest organised crime force in the city. Bulger and his gang are seen engaging in various acts of violence, gunning down the owner of a company in which Bulger has an interest and strangling the stepdaughter of his associate Stephen Flemmi. At the same time, Bulger is beset by personal tragedy, including the death of his young son Douglas. In his sorrow, Bulger develops an increasing interest in the Irish Republican Army cause; when a cache of weapons that he's sent across the Atlantic is intercepted, newly appointed US attorney Fred Wyshak intensifies his investigation into Bulger's activities – particularly his privileged relationship with Connolly. Unmasked as an FBI informant, Bulger leaves Boston. He is finally captured in 2011.

Brand A Second Coming

USA/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Ondi Timoner
Certificate 15 104m 28s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Comedian/actor/activist Russell Brand has been so ubiquitous across the entire British media for so many years that the most immediate question concerning Ondi Timoner's documentary portrait is whether it brings anything fresh to the table that's worth paying to see. After nearly two hyperactively bludgeoning hours, the answer remains inconclusive, although Timoner performs a valuable service in marshalling a vast amount of archive material in order to demonstrate both that Brand's political activism goes back much further than recent caricatures would suggest, and that his career and philosophy as a whole are a lot more consistent than his scattershot public image might imply. Although the film ultimately tells us little that most of Brand's compatriots (at least those interested enough to consider seeing it) won't already know, as a one-stop primer it's an exemplary guide, clearly in thrall to Brand's undeniable charisma but also peppered with plenty of home-hitting criticism.

However, Timoner also stresses that, for all the unashamed puerility that runs through the film like a particularly phallic stick of rock (the title is drawn from a stand-up routine suggesting that Jesus Christ, like Brand, might well be the kind of empathetic lover who waits until his partner has satisfied herself first), there's a fundamental seriousness of purpose to Brand's clowning that's often masked and sometimes undermined by the more eye-catching and self-aggrandising surface elements. Halfway through, the BAC Rehab Centre's Noreen Oliver sums him up well: "He's a nutcase: there is no doubt about it, but for somebody to say he doesn't understand the subject because he's a comedian is just complete nonsense, because he wasn't just an addict, he went away and did his homework." (This comment was in reaction to Peter Hitchens's complaint about why he, an implicitly serious and important journalist, was discussing British drugs policy on the same programme as a mere comedian.)

The film is bisected into two roughly equal halves: the first being a whistle-stop tour of Brand's first 40 years. Snappily edited, superbly researched to the point of including video footage of a school-play ad lib during a production of *Bugsy Malone*, it also contrives to have Brand's own autobiographical stand-up routines playing over footage of the events in question – notably when he stripped naked on top of a police

Grand designs: Russell Brand

van during one of his earlier political protests. (Claiming, somewhat unconvincingly, to be inspired by Malcolm X, he was swiftly removed and charged with indecent exposure.) Career highs and lows intermingle, with Brand's gadfly philosophising anchored by numerous agreeably straight-talking interviewees. Oasis's Noel Gallagher, a personal friend, is one of the bluntest, but his mockery is more obviously based on affection than the bemused head-shaking of former *Newsnight* inquisitor Jeremy Paxman.

The second, more overtly political half is weaker, largely because Brand's own notion of 'revolution' ultimately seems so inarticulate when examined outside the quip-peppered, adrenaline-rush environment of a live performance. Locally, he can be very effective (his activism on behalf of Hoxton's New Era estate), but when it comes to discussing more global issues, all too often he falls back on vague sloganeering – by way of example, Timoner highlights his notorious advocacy of non-voting. (The film premiered a few weeks prior to his notorious retraction in the run-up to the 2015 British general election, whose outcome he tried and conspicuously failed to influence.) He's constantly caught thinking out loud in a way that professional politicians do their utmost to suppress, at one point describing his book *Revolution* as "to a degree, *Mein Kampf*", before cheerfully conceding that that might not be the best parallel. Ample evidence suggests that while he's intensely self-critical, he is at the same time extremely thin-skinned when it comes to handling criticism from others, which might also limit his political future. Towards the end of the film, he disarmingly confesses, "I'm a narcissist, but I'm *your* narcissist" – he's still that schoolboy ad libber trying to work a crowd.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ondi Timoner
Written by
Ondi Timoner
Directors of Photography
Ondi Timoner
Svetlana Cvetko
Edited by
Ondi Timoner
Tim Rush
David Timoner
Clay Zimmerman
Original Music
Brian Zack Lewis
This Patch of Sky
Sound Re-recording Mixer
Paul Hollman

©Interloper Films
Production Companies
Interloper Films presents in association with Mayfair Film Partnership a film by Ondi Timoner
Executive Producer
Andrew Antonio
Film Extracts
Bedtime Stories (2008)
Get Him to the Greek (2010)
Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979)
Forgetting Sarah Marshall (2008)

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

A documentary portrait of British comedian, actor and activist Russell Brand, told through extensive archive material (filmed performances, news footage, home movies, stills, headlines) and a mixture of old and new interviews with Brand, his family and friends and those who've encountered him professionally on both sides of the camera. Subjects covered include his unconventional Essex upbringing, expulsion from drama school, his growing success as a comedian, his addiction to sex, drugs and yoga, short-lived marriage to Katy Perry, media scandals, his work for Comic Relief and rehab charities and his emergence as a serious political activist.

Bridge of Spies

USA/United Kingdom/Germany/India 2015
Director: Steven Spielberg
Certificate 12A 141m 10s

See Feature on page 26

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

It's a true-life Cold War saga that has ached for adaptation since the moment it happened: Gregory Peck wanted to film it in the 1960s, and eventually a 1976 network TV movie was made, starring Lee Majors. The post-Bay of Pigs scrimmage centred on two men – pilot Francis Gary Powers, shot down with his new U-2 plane over the USSR and convicted as a spy, and Rudolf Abel, a quiet Russian agent already held by the Americans – and the tense exchange that was finally, famously, carried out on the Glienicke Bridge straddling the border between West and East Berlin. Why now, we may ask, as the Cold War becomes nostalgically hot once again, primarily on American TV and in German movies? Perhaps it's simply that from today's fraught and globally bloodied perspective, the civilised détente and urbane spycraft of the era look positively benign. Compared to 9/11, Isis, al-Qaeda, Libya, Bashar al-Assad and the American-led responses to all the above, the shady chess-playing counterplotting of the Cold War looks like an innocence lost.

It wasn't all just head-game encryption and deception, but of course a Spielberg lens on the period, just as with the slavery era, World War I, the Depression and WWII, cannot help but capture the milieu's quaintest textures. There's not an awful lot at stake in this movie's thrust or attitude towards history, just as there wasn't really all that much at stake with the Powers-Abel swap, but as so often when Spielberg is being serious, you get flavours of lush matinee immersiveness and you pay for them with your soul. Far more than the totally risible *War Horse* (2011), that misty-eyed man-animal-love epic so sodden with overdramatisation that shot-countershot sequences would play out with sunsets in both halves of the sky, *Bridge of Spies* demonstrates Spielberg's fluency with place-setting and enveloping atmosphere, and how his overall storytelling sensibility subsequently reduces it all to a pandering bore.

Focusing on James B. Donovan (Tom Hanks), the New York lawyer who defended Abel (Mark Rylance) against espionage charges, lost in a state-slanted disgrace and then saved his client from the electric chair, as well as subsequently negotiating the bridge exchange out of an individual sense of fairness, the movie has plenty to work with: the monstrous press of the era's vast and absurd espionage apparatus upon a single bewildered civilian, an average man lost in a state of shadows, simply trying to do good. But Spielberg cannot imagine a moment without haloing it in a golden tracking shot, cannot know of a cliché without revisiting it in triplicate, cannot create a dramatic moment without backlighting its meaning in smoky xenon arc light. It's like a chronic pathology with him; you sense, watching his past few decades' work, that he can't help himself, no matter how clearly he might be aware that his telegraphing, lip-biting, blue-beams-of-light hyperbole is an embarrassment from the 1980s. If it's a movie about spies hustling around in 1962 Berlin, then a schoolkid would reflexively stage a superfluous chase-on-foot scene on a rainy night under black umbrellas,

Pilot scheme: Mark Rylance

and so Spielberg does. Characters routinely speak, get up to leave and then turn around for one more dramatic dollop, in booming close-up.

The characters, predominantly Donovan and Abel, are structured around repeated running gags; the ever calm Abel is asked no fewer than three times whether he's anxious or afraid, and replies each time, "Would it help?" (The first time suggests dry depths of the mysterious man's character; the third summons only groans.) Donovan's initial skill as an insurance lawyer (mentioning but never utilising the fact that he worked on the Nuremberg trials) rises to the surface later in his spy negotiations as verbal tics, just as the oxygen tank in *Jaws* (1975) is pointed out to us mid-film and then reappears magically in the end to solve the story. Practically every scene ends with an ostensibly ironic-comic gotcha.

Scenes that aren't Spielberg-ready are elided; Abel's entire court case is boiled down to his sentencing, which naturally inspires an unlikely near-riot in the courtroom, because why not? With an eye towards 'making' us 'feel', dots are connected with a manic accountant's compulsion, all the way to the year's jackpot of eye-rolling feelgood endings. Thomas Newman's music booms and blasts its brass-section feelings, struggling to make mountains out of every grain of anthill sand.

The film is hard to take seriously in the end – it's not the sophisticated Cold War drama you'd expect, but more like an afterschool-special version of one, full of adolescent emphasis. All this comes down, one supposes, to the kind of filmgoer you are – a wolf or a sheep, to put it uncharitably. But Spielberg's pandering reflexes grate here because there is otherwise plenty to enjoy: the incongruously adult semi-literacy of the screenplay is refreshing after a summer of flavourless cotton candy. (Joel and Ethan Coen are co-credited, though their fingerprints are invisible.) Hanks, as treasurable by now for his thorough everyday unattractiveness as a movie star as for his fiercely likeable intelligence, is deft and convincing. The cast around him are all fine, given their overworked constraints, and, most importantly, they are relatively unfamiliar – the usual (and sometimes fun) parade of bristly character-actor stars doing robust bits of business is altogether avoided. (In the typically empty Mrs Donovan role, Amy Ryan is wasted.)

The visual opulence on hand, traditionally Spielberg's ace in the hole, is by today as familiar as the wallpaper facing the toilet in your house; the man's box-office-juice aesthetic is so often copied that now it's anonymous. There are, however, few A-list directors I can think of who would trick out this tale this way, with this much distrust in his or her audience's attention.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Steven Spielberg
Marc Platt
Kristie Macosko Krieger
Written by
Matt Charman
Ethan Coen
Joel Coen
Director of Photography
Janusz Kaminski
Edited by
Michael Kahn
Production Designer
Adam Stockhausen
Music
Thomas Newman
Production Sound Mixer
Drew Kunin
Costume Designer
Kasia Walicka Maimone

©DreamWorks II Distribution Co., LLC, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC

Production Companies
Fox 2000 Pictures, DreamWorks Pictures and Reliance Entertainment present in association with Participant Media and TSG Entertainment
A co-production between Afterworks Limited and Studio Babelsberg
An Amblin Entertainment/Marc Platt production
A Steven Spielberg film
Produced with the support of DFFF, MFG, MBB
Executive Producers
Adam Somner
Daniel Lupi
Jeff Skoll
Jonathan King

Cast

Tom Hanks James B. Donovan
Mark Rylance Rudolf Abel
Scott Shepherd Hoffman
Amy Ryan Mary Donovan
Sebastian Koch Wolfgang Vogel
Alan Alda Thomas Watters Jr
Austin Stowell Francis Gary Powers
Billy Magnussen Doug Forrester
Eve Hewson Carol Donovan
Jesse Plemons Joe Murphy
Michael Gaston Agent Williams
Peter McRobbie Allen Dulles
Domenick Lombardozzi Agent Blasco
Mikhail Gorevoy Ivan Schischkin
Will Rogers Frederic Pryor

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

US, 1957. Soviet spy Rudolf Abel is arrested, and insurance lawyer James B. Donovan is asked by the government to handle the thankless task of defending him. With no real chance to wage a legal fight, Donovan loses, but succeeds in avoiding execution for his client. A few years later, American pilot Francis Gary Powers, flying a U-2 spy-plane, is shot down over the USSR. Donovan is asked to negotiate an exchange of the two prisoners. He goes to Berlin for negotiations, just as the city is being divided by a wall, and finds himself in a murky world of Cold War espionage. Against the CIA's wishes, he presses for the release of a second prisoner, an innocent student, and is successful. All three are returned to their home nations. Donovan, once reviled as the lawyer of a communist spy, goes home a hero.

Carol

United Kingdom/USA 2014
Director: Todd Haynes
Certificate 15 118m 30s

See Feature on page 18

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Patricia Highsmith's 1952 lesbian love story *Carol*, originally a pseudonymously published million-selling pulp fiction, *The Price of Salt*, is the only non-crime novel she wrote. Yet Todd Haynes's masterfully intelligent and meticulous screen adaptation links it smartly to her transgression-packed oeuvre from the get-go. For love is the crime here. Wealthy housewife Carol and callow shopgirl Therese's slow-burning passion is an offence against society, for which they are hunted, and Carol punished.

Haynes's continuing fascination with women trapped by social norms runs back as far as *Safe*'s life-allergic trophy housewife, through *Far from Heaven*'s doomed interracial love and *Mildred Pierce*'s class tensions. In *Carol*, which is to some extent a companion piece to *Far from Heaven*, the master of postmodern melodrama and loving pastiche has created instead a swooning yet adroitly understated love story. A knowing, heartfelt lesbian do-over of the Old Hollywood template for impossible romance, *Carol* wears its yearning as stylishly as Cate Blanchett's patrician Carol sports Sandy Powell's gorgeously fitted 50s costumes, her popping red hats, scarves and curvy mouth hinting at banked fires.

Elegant restraint is the film's watchword – it seduces its audience as nimbly as it does Rooney Mara's awestruck Therese. We're reeled in by the exquisite dance of gestures exchanged over a crackling martini-fuelled lunch or an elaborately innocent upstate New York visit: darting eye meets, questioning glances, shared smiles. This low-key courtship is daringly unhurried but deftly punctuated with tiny eroticised details that keep it bubbling. When it boils, the lovemaking is a decorous, retro flurry of bare backs and tumbled heads, the women's intimacy kept private from us. In this enjoyably deliberate film, each shot and scene is carefully composed to pay homage to 50s cinema, yet infused with an emotional ambiguity which feels decidedly contemporary.

The other fine romance is that of Highsmith and Haynes, or perhaps it's a love triangle once you've factored in Phyllis Nagy's fine, spare script. Faithful to the book's plotting, the film makes its own heady mood, distinct from the loucher, more sardonic feel of the novel. Nagy's script nimbly opens up Carol's home life and her confident carapace, and subtly swings around late on to make her the needier partner. Like *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), this is a recreation that deepens and even enriches its source material.

Eschewing *Far from Heaven*'s Sirkian Technicolor, Haynes's early-50s is a more sober, post-war vision, with a subdued but intense colour palette, pitch-perfect New York settings and bustling, wet-street feel inspired by New York photographers such as Saul Leiter. Carter Burwell's swelling Philip Glass-ish score and Ed Lachman's cinematography frame the reserved lovers eloquently. Often gazing through internal windows or doorways to separate or distance characters, the camera is elaborately watchful. Capable of dissecting a stifling Wasp party in a single shot or dwelling lovingly on a curvy Packard, Haynes skewers as well as limns the 50s here. Men are the era's moral enforcers – chiefly Carol's controlling country-club-catch of an ex-husband Harge, who tears her away from Therese and into therapy for 'deviancy' to retain access to her child. Casting Kyle Chandler (effectively America's ideal husband after TV's *Friday Night Lights*) is a sly but inspired stroke. Watching him grab, slur and threaten is the women's-picture equivalent of Henry Fonda's shock villainy in *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968).

Fires were started: Cory Michael Smith, Cate Blanchett, Rooney Mara

But the film is overwhelmingly sustained by the two excellent performances at its heart. Blanchett's is the more studied portrayal – playfully predatory, with blond furs, deep voice and slanting eyes. Her Carol has a screen-siren allure, keeping both camera and lover rapt, even when nerves and misery shake her fine facade. Gazing despairingly at a phone during a forbidden call, she's almost Garbo-esque. Her sleek opacity is beautifully complemented by Mara's tender, enraptured timidity, gradually emboldened by love and suffering. Swinging between hope and fear as their risky liaison unfurls, she's astonishingly good.

Fans of the exuberantly po-mo, subversive and self-referential Haynes will have to dig deep to find what they love in *Carol*, but it's there. The cerebral, playfully cinephile archness of *Velvet Goldmine* (1998) and *Far from Heaven* (2002) has become a game of subtle signals. There's a narrative bookending that blows a big kiss to *Brief Encounter* (1945), as do the couple's damped-down emotional encounters. Sparks of Joan Crawford camp erupt in Carol's growl – "Just when you think it can't get any *worse*, you run out of cigarettes" – and in her grandstanding defiance of an all-male custody meeting. 'The Gaze' is consciously manipulated through every cheekbone-grazing close-up. But it's all resolutely in the service of the film's intoxicating love story, and Haynes pulls it off magnificently. Nowhere more so than in the last scene, where his leading ladies create a wordless but glorious finale that outdoes even Highsmith's high note. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Elizabeth Karslen
Stephen Woolley
Christine Vachon
Screenplay
Phyllis Nagy
Based on the novel *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith
Director of Photography
Ed Lachman
Film Editor
Affonso Gonçalves
Production Designer
Judy Becker
Music
Carter Burwell
Production Sound Mixer
Geoff Maxwell
Costume Designer
Sandy Powell

©Number 9 Films (Carol) Limited/ Channel Four Television Corporation
Production Companies
Film4 presents in association with Studiocanal, Hanway Films, Goldcrest, Dirty Films, InFilm a Karlsen/Woolley/ Number 9 Films/Killer Films production in association with Larkhark Films Limited
A film by Todd Haynes
In association with Compton Investments
Developed with the assistance of Film4, Good Machine
Developed with the support of the BFI Film Fund
Produced by Larkhark Films Limited
Executive Producers
Tessa Ross
Dorothy Berwin
Thorsten Schumacher
Bob Weinstein
Harvey Weinstein
Danny Perkins
Cate Blanchett
Andrew Upton
Robert Jolliffe
Film Extracts
Sunset Blvd. (1950)

Cast
Cate Blanchett
Carol Aird
Rooney Mara
Therese Belivet
Sarah Paulson
Abby Gerhard
Jake Lacy
Richard Semco
John Magaro
Dannie McElroy
Cory Michael Smith
Tommy Tucker
Carrie Brownstein
Genevieve Cantrell
Kevin Crowley
Fred Haymes
Nik Pajic
Phil McElroy
Kyle Chandler
Harge Aird
Sadie Heim
Kennedy Heim
Rindy Aird

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

New York, 1952. Carol and Therese are having drinks in a hotel when they are interrupted by a friend of Therese's. Therese has a flashback to their first meeting.

Then a shopgirl and would-be photographer, she finds a Christmas toy for glamorous divorcee Carol, and returns her forgotten gloves. After several meetings, Therese becomes infatuated with Carol, and distanced from boyfriend Richard. Carol's suspicious ex-husband Harge files custody papers for daughter Rindy, with a morality clause. Carol takes Therese on a road trip, where they become close, and meet salesman Tucker. After having sex for the first time in a motel, they discover that Tucker, a private eye, has tape-recorded them for Harge's custody case. Carol leaves suddenly, ending the relationship by letter. Heartbroken, Therese busies herself with her photographic work and tries unsuccessfully to contact Carol. Carol suffers through family lunches to see Rindy; at the custody meeting, she concedes custody of her daughter. Carol invites Therese for drinks, and asks her to move in with her. Therese refuses and leaves for a party. But there, despite another woman's interest, she realises that she wants Carol. Crossing a restaurant to find her, she is greeted by Carol's slow smile.

Closer to the Moon

Romania/USA/Italy/Poland/France 2013
Director: Nae Caranfil
Certificate 12A 112m 10s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Romanian director Nae Caranfil's first English-language movie (he has also directed films in French) is based on real-life events of 1959, when a group of Jewish ex-WWII resistance fighters banded together to rob the state bank in Bucharest – less for profit, it seems, than to express their contempt for the Stalinist regime. They were later caught, sentenced to death and – bizarrely enough – obliged pending their execution to take part in a filmed re-enactment of their crime, intended to be used as a warning to dissidents. The end credits of *Closer to the Moon* include shots taken from this original official propaganda exercise, which has also been the subject of two documentaries: Alexandru Solomon's *Great Communist Bank Robbery* (2004) and *Reconstruction* (2002) by Irene Lusztig, whose grandmother was one of the gang. It's also obliquely referenced in another film entitled *Reconstruction* – Lucian Pintilie's classic 1968 Romanian New Wave comedy.

Closer to the Moon – the title refers to the pioneering moon landing of the USSR's Luna 2 mission, which coincided with the heist – also plays out mainly as a comedy, though of the darkest stamp: an ultra-black Jewish joke, perhaps. Given that early on in the movie the five principal characters are condemned to death by firing squad, the blackness is built in; the comedy is less securely anchored. It's hard to derive much amusement from a scene in which the four male members of the gang are lined up in jail and subjected to crude verbal and physical abuse by the brutally anti-Semitic prison commander (Martin McDougall). Beside this, the knockabout element associated with the drunken director Flaviu (Allan Corduner) feels clumsy.

Characters tend towards stock. Harry Lloyd (Viserys Targaryen, Daenerys's ill-fated brother, in *Game of Thrones*) can't do much with his 'wide-eyed innocent' role as Virgil, the young ex-waiter who gets caught up in the filming process and falls for the one female member of the gang (Vera Farmiga), while David de Keyser piles on the oy-vey clichés as his philosophical elderly landlord. Still, some members of the cast transcend the script's limitations. Mark Strong lends his compellingly slow-burn, saturnine presence to Max Rosenthal, leader of the gang (and, to compound the irony, a colonel in the police force), and Farmiga laces self-mocking humour with a quiet sensuality that makes her wholly credible as the object of Virgil's infatuation. The standout performance, though, comes from Anton Lesser as Holban, the senior state security official charged with overseeing filming. Coldly menacing at first, the embodiment of robotic oppression, he gradually deteriorates into a shell-shocked, unshaven figure, as much a victim of the regime as those who oppose it.

A little too flashback-heavy, and never quite settling on the right tone, Caranfil's film still offers a rueful, intriguingly offbeat insight into life behind the Iron Curtain which, at its best, recalls the bittersweet ironies of the mid-60s Czech New Wave. S

Unreleased: Mark Strong, Vera Farmiga

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael Fitzgerald
Renata Rainieri
Bobby Paunescu
Alessandro Leone
Denis Friedman
Written by
Nae Caranfil
Director of Photography
Marius Panduru
Editor
Roberto Silvi

Production Designer
Cristian Niculescu
Music
Laurent Couson
Sound Designer
Dominique Viellard
Costume Designer
Doina Levintza

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Production Companies
Ithaca LLC presents with the support of Centrul National Al Cinematografie a Polish Film Institute co-financed production
In collaboration with Zenith Media Communication

Executive Producers
Ugo Tucci
Penelope Glass

Cast
Vera Farmiga
Alice
Mark Strong
Max Rosenthal
Tim Plester
Dumi
Christian McKay
Yorgu
Joe Armstrong
Razvan
Harry Lloyd
Virgil
Marcin Walewski
Mirel
Anton Lesser
Holban
Allan Corduner
Flaviu
David de Keyser
Moritz
Martin McDougall
prison commander

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
New Entertainment

Romanian theatrical title
Mai aproape de luna

Bucharest 1959. Virgil, a young waiter, sees a bank heist taking place outside the café where he works. The robbers explain that they're just making a film. Virgil visits the local film studio and is taken on as a camera assistant by director Flaviu. Holban, a state security official, tells Virgil that he'll be working on a propaganda film for the regime. In court to film the trial and sentencing to death of five criminals, Virgil is amazed to recognise the 'filmmakers' he saw earlier – who are then taken under guard to perform a filmed reconstruction of their crime. Flaviu, lazy and drunken, soon falls asleep, leaving Virgil and Max Rosenthal, the leader of the gang, to direct the film under Holban's supervision.

New Year's Eve, 1958. Max has a public row with his wife, sister of a powerful minister. He goes to celebrate New Year with his friends Dumi, Yorgu and Razvan, all Jewish ex-resistance fighters increasingly sidelined by the communist regime. They're joined by their old comrade Alice, just back from the USSR; she is Max's ex-lover and has a son by him, Mirel. They resolve to make a spectacular gesture against the regime by robbing the state bank. The robbery goes off well, but they're inadvertently betrayed by Yorgu.

During the shoot, Flaviu wakes up and becomes angry, throwing a fit. Taking advantage of the commotion, Alice slips away to see her son. Virgil follows her. They spend the night together; the next day she gives herself up. The minister arrives, stops the shoot and takes Holban off the case. Max and his friends face the firing squad; Alice is spared, as she's pregnant. In 1964 she's given an amnesty; she leaves for Israel with Mirel and her daughter.

Crimson Peak

USA 2015
Director: Guillermo del Toro
Certificate 15 118m 39s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Like his earlier films *The Devil's Backbone* (2001) and *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak* has at its heart a visual centrepiece that is genuinely haunted – in this case a cavernous, ruined mansion full of clutching, bloody ghosts that might be kin to the spook in the del Toro-produced *Mama* (2013) and are CGI models built around the frame of the director's favoured monster-man Doug Jones – but the real horrors here come from malicious living human beings.

Shorn of the Spanish Civil War setting (and Spanish-language dialogue) of the earlier films, *Crimson Peak* still has its element of vitriolic social analysis. Early on, Carter Cushing (Jim Beaver), the practical, bearded, self-made father of heroine Edith, feels the soft hands of aristocratic petitioner Sir Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston) before turning him down for a loan. Dismissing the model of the steam excavator that Thomas wants to invent as a 'toy', Cushing sees the weak-blooded swain as infantile, and it later turns out that Thomas has indeed spent a great deal of time manufacturing odd, creepy playthings for his smothering sister Lucille (Jessica Chastain). Strangely, this boyish streak is the thing that del Toro likes most about his supposedly fatal man, and Hiddleston plays Thomas's squirming indecision to perfection. In the end, even mad Lucille agrees with Cushing and entreats him to get his hands dirty by committing one of the murders that she has been getting away with to support their mad ménage.

Del Toro has explained that he sees *Crimson Peak* as a gothic romance rather than a horror film. Like Daphne du Maurier with *Rebecca*, del Toro and co-scenarist Matthew Robbins scramble elements from *Jane Eyre* (which Charlotte Brontë deliberately repurposed from Ann Radcliffe and other full-blooded gothic practitioners): a vast and many-storied old house far removed from other human habitation; a mysterious earlier marriage (here, in Bluebeard fashion, a clutch of them – though only the last Lady Sharpe has left a ghost, along with a collection of incriminating wax cylinders and photographs); a strangely passive master in the power of a sinister secondary woman; and an initially timid yet resolute heroine who gets to the bottom of it all and survives dire peril. All that's missing is a climactic conflagration, as if del Toro were so in love with Allerdale Hall that he can't bear to go the full approved Roger Corman *House of Usher* route and expunge the past by burning it down.

The real strength of *Crimson Peak* is its magnificent ruin, where leaves and snow flutter down through a gaping hole in the ceiling, a rickety cage lift plunges to a basement, walls drip with disgusting red clay and the particular composition of the soil stains the snow the colour of blood (hence the title, which has a vaguely menstrual connotation). Each tiny detail of art direction and set decoration adds to an environment the camera loves to explore. To preserve this, the demented Lucille commits multiple murders – bludgeoning heads against solid sinks or stirring poison into porridge – and the true gothic passion of the film

The house that dripped blood: Tom Hiddleston, Mia Wasikowska

comes not in the whirl of loves and jealousies surrounding the heroine but in the villainess's resolute commitment to her horrific home.

Mia Wasikowska, who has already played Alice in Wonderland and Jane Eyre, is a postmodern gothic heroine: Edith has already channelled her own *Sixth Sense* visions into a novel-in-progress (a publisher suggests adding a love story) and is required to save herself *and* her would-be rescuer by getting into a final-girl-vs-psycho-killer confrontation with her nemesis sister-in-law/rival at the finale. Echoing the razor-cut mouth of *Pan's Labyrinth*, the tangle of conflicts is played out with horribly intimate wounds – Lucille stabs the hero in the armpit and her brother in the face, while Edith fights back with a deadly pen (a gift from her father) and finishes the job with a shovel and a quip ("I heard you the first time") that seems more like a *coup de grâce* from an 80s slasher film (specifically, *Psycho II*) than a 19th-century gothic.

There are a few infelicities of dialogue – Edith points out Thomas's handmade shoes in an era when everyone's were – and the whole contraption of plot and setting is so intricate and symbol-studded (the house is full of butterfly-killing moths that flap even in midwinter) that the conventional tortured romance seems a touch rote. This has shocks but few scares – after all, in del Toro's world, ghosts may look alarming but they are basically our friends. Nevertheless, this is a rich essay in the form, which takes care to evoke even the lighting cues of vintage Roger Corman or Mario Bava in the service of a rattling good melodrama.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Thomas Tull
Jon Jashni
Guillermo del Toro
Callum Greene
Written by
Guillermo del Toro
Matthew Robbins
Director of Photography
Dan Lausten
Film Editor
Bernat Vilaplana
Production Designer
Tom Sanders
Music
Fernando Velázquez
Sound Designer
Randy Thom
Costume Designer
Kate Hawley

©Legendary
Production Companies
Legendary Pictures and Universal Pictures present a Legendary Pictures/Ddy Production A Guillermo del Toro film
Executive Producer
Jillian Share

Cast
Mia Wasikowska
Edith Cushing
Jessica Chastain
Lucille Sharpe
Tom Hiddleston
Thomas Sharpe
Charlie Hunnam
Dr Alan Michael
Jim Beaver
Carter Cushing
Burn Gorman
Holly
Leslie Hope
Mrs McMichael
Doug Jones
Edith's mother/Lady Sharpe
Jonathan Hyde
Ogilvie
Bruce Gray
Ferguson
Emily Coutts
Eunice
Alec Stockwell
Finlay
Brigitte Robinson
Jane, secretary

Dolby Digital
In Colour
Prints by
Fotokem
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

Buffalo, New York, 1901. Thomas Sharpe, an English baronet, tries to persuade wealthy businessman Carter Cushing to invest in a steam-powered excavator, which he hopes will restore the fortunes of his family's clay mine. Turned down for the loan, Thomas woos Cushing's daughter Edith, a young woman who sees ghosts and wants to be a writer. Cushing sends a private investigator to look into Thomas and his devoted sister Lucille, and tries to buy them off – but he is murdered. Edith marries Thomas and is taken to Allerdale Hall, the family's decrepit mansion in Cumberland. There she sees angry spirits – they are the ghosts of the siblings' murdered mother and one of Thomas's several previous wives, who were married for their money and then poisoned. Thomas falls genuinely in love with Edith, but is unable to escape from Lucille, with whom he has an incestuous relationship. Lucille pushes Edith downstairs, but Edith is saved by the arrival of Dr Alan McMichael, an admirer who suspects that the Sharpes intend murder. Lucille stabs Alan, but Thomas spares him in an attempt to save Edith. Lucille tries to force Edith to sign over her fortune, but Edith stabs her with a pen. Lucille kills Thomas and pursues Edith. Thomas manifests as a ghost; Edith defeats and kills Lucille.

Do I Sound Gay?

USA 2014
Director: David Thorpe
Certificate 15 77m 12s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

The question in the title of David Thorpe's first film is a rhetorical one: the upspeak implied by the question mark is a feature of the (North American) 'gay voice'. The filmmaker, a New York-based journalist, interrogates his own vocal sounds through working with speech professionals and interviewing linguistics professors and cultural historians, and by carrying out vox pops in urban centres in the US and western Europe.

Offering a first-person framework for a cultural history – or expanding a personal anxiety through a political investigation – Thorpe starts with his own distaste for his voice, which has been brought into focus by a recent break-up, and moves outwards. Upspeak and long vowels characterise the 'gay voice', according to vocal coach Susan Sankin and linguistics professor Ron Smyth. From Smyth and others, Thorpe hears sharp explanations both for the origins of these vocal characteristics and for his own negative reaction to them. In the most persuasive and detailed section of Thorpe's documentary, film historian Richard Barrios points to the classist aspects of the pansy character of early sound cinema, villainised from Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944) onwards. Thorpe reflects on how he internalised the "witty, aristocratic" attitudes and double entendres of television personalities such as Paul Lynde and Liberace, who were never out of the closet but were clearly different.

Commentator and agony aunt Dan Savage pinpoints the source of the difference in gay men's adoption of what are perceived as feminine characteristics, including upspeak, stating that that part of homophobia is misogyny. Thus contemporary gay porn eroticises the straight-acting daddy archetype, not least his deep bass voice. When Thorpe asks a group of sunbathers on Fire Island why they think he's attracted to more butch voices, one calls it "Stockholm syndrome" – being attracted to the sound of those who bullied you.

Given Roland Emmerich's counterfactual claim in a recent Buzzfeed interview that Danny, the protagonist of *Stonewall*, is "very straight-acting, he gets mistreated because of that," Thorpe's exploration of the perpetuation of prejudice against gay-acting gay men is a timely one. He provides clear evidence of the complex intersections of misogyny, homophobia and classism in the production of the 'gay voice', its cultural connotations and attitudes towards it. His personal journey is not, however, completely integrated into the broader cultural narrative. While it's undoubtedly positive that Thorpe moves towards acceptance of his voice – despite promises from Hollywood vocal coach Bob Corff to give him a "powerful, authoritative and dependable" voice like that of Alec Baldwin's Republican businessman Jack Donaghy in *30 Rock* – he doesn't do enough to interrogate his own relationship to gay culture, particularly his position as a white, wealthy, urban male. It's striking that the most queer-positive expression and clearest analysis come from his friend Miguel and from actor-comedians Margaret Cho and George Takei, none of whom are white and so have additional cause to analyse

What's in a voice?: David Thorpe

internalised and external oppressions.

"We are pioneers in our time of changing societal perceptions of what it is to be gay," notes Takei, and Thorpe's film undeniably contributes to that through his portraits of three long-term gay couples: Takei and his husband Brad, Savage and his husband Terry, and writer David Sedaris and his partner Hugh. These intimate conversations, like the use of archival material, extend both the investigation and the filmmaking beyond vlog-like frontal shots of Thorpe in his apartment using his straight-acting voice, with knowing irony, to point out his trivet and read from *Madame Bovary*. But we know the straight-acting voice is doomed: – in the most innovative cinematic device in the film, Thorpe reads the opening credits and delivers the voiceover throughout in speech patterns that are confidently elongated and upspoken.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Howard Gertler David Thorpe **Written by** David Thorpe **Co-writer** Maeve O'Boyle **Director of Photography** Matt Bockelman **Editor** Maeve O'Boyle Nicholas Bussey **Original Score** John Turner **Sound Edit** David Briggs ©ThinkThorpe LLC **Production Companies** Impact Partners presents a Think Thorpe/Little Punk production A film by David Thorpe Made with the generous support of Impact Partners, Josh Thorpe and Suzanne Thorpe and of IFP, NYSCA **Executive Producer** Dan Cogan **In Colour [1.78:1]** **Distributor** Kaleidoscope Film Distribution

A documentary in which New York-based journalist David Thorpe explores the notion of 'the gay voice'.

Single after the break-up of a long-term relationship, Thorpe has lost confidence in himself and has begun to feel self-conscious about his speech patterns. He asks friends, people in the street, cultural historians, performers and linguists whether he sounds gay – and experiments with vocal exercises to see if he can alter his voice. He uncovers a cultural history of the gay male voice in the US that touches on misogyny, classism and racism. At the same time he entwines his own personal history with a portrait of successful gay men – Dan Savage, George Takei and David Sedaris – whose confidence, it is suggested, has emerged from embracing their identity, speech patterns included.

Dressed as a Girl

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Colin Rothbart
Certificate 18 100m 34s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

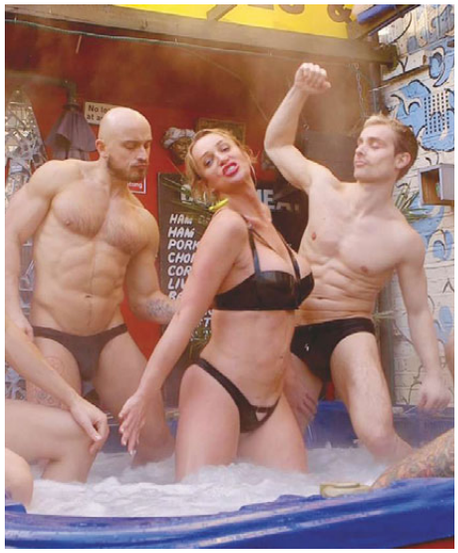
These are complex times where gender identity is concerned. People of ambiguous, fluid or altered gender have a more established mainstream profile than ever before, and yet fierce debates around identity politics have seen feminists attack transsexual people as travesties of 'real' females, and trans women raise objections to the assumption that they should or should wish to 'pass' as cisgender women. Roland Emmerich's film *Stonewall*, which was expected to bring gay political history into the mainstream, has instead met with unalloyed opprobrium for presenting a whitewashed and 'straight-acting' version that excludes the significant part played by trans women in the events portrayed.

Whether drag – that long-established outlet for alternative gender identities – is part of a solution or part of a problem is a hotly debated point. The mainstream US TV hit *RuPaul's Drag Race* has been criticised for 'transphobia' over its hostess's use of the terms 'shemale' and 'tranny'. London's Royal Vauxhall Tavern has been granted listed status because of its significance to the LGBT community as a site of drag performances; but earlier this year an alternative gay event in Glasgow announced a decision (later rescinded) not to book drag performers in case they offended trans people.

Amid all this confusion (hell, I'm not even sure whether I'm allowed to write about it), Colin Rothbart's warm, thoughtful and engaging portrait of a group of people united by a liking for drag performance acts as a kind of palate cleanser, reminding us that whatever off-the-peg political factions individuals might choose to align with, ultimately every single story is bespoke. The first act, in which our grotesquely glamorous host Jonny Woo introduces a group of hedonistic frenemies with variable artistic skills and stupendous drug appetites, hints at self-indulgence – there's only so much fun to be had watching other people get wasted. But the film matures startlingly as it progresses, skilfully picking out what's most fascinating about its central characters and their contrasting journeys through early adulthood.

Watching wild child Amber transition from chunky, tattooed skinhead to lissom Uma Thurman lookalike is a jaw-dropper, although what's most moving in her story is the re-establishment of her relationship with a gruff northern father who pushes her to eat up her peas, evades discussion of her new breasts by criticising the positioning of her gas meter and insists throughout that to him, she still looks like Dean. Watching Jonny Woo and Scottee perform is an utter pleasure in itself, as is their articulate examination of what turned them into who they became, and the contributions of their parents. The lonely tales of Holestar and Pia emphasise that there can be outsiders even in crews of avowed outsiders. Ever-reluctant drag queen John Sizzle, meanwhile, offers a beautifully precise personal account of the interaction between gay identity and anonymous sex, once again accented by the thoughts of his mum.

Sentimentality only crops up here in the most cleverly contradictory of places; and while bitchiness is present, it never overwhelms a genuine investment in character, personal history and artistic identity. It would make a terrific feature film but for the fact that you would never find actors to play these people half as well as they play themselves.



Ring in the changes: Amber Waze

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Colin Rothbart Chris Amos **Written by** Colin Rothbart **Filmed by** Colin Rothbart **Edited by** Duncan Wilson **Sound Recordists** Stuart Burroughs Valerio Cerini ©Blue Oyster Pictures Limited **Production Companies** World of Wonder, Dartmouth Films and Blue Oyster Pictures present a Blue Oyster Pictures Limited production **Executive Producers** Fenton Bailey Randy Barbato Christopher Hird **In Colour [1.78:1]** **Distributor** Peccadillo Pictures Ltd

A documentary about the East London drag scene. In 2013, drag queen Jonny Woo introduces a group of drag performers who met organising the uproarious East London social event Gay Bingo in 2003, and traces what has become of them in the ten intervening years.

Scottee, gay, conspicuously talented and scarred by a troubled upbringing, establishes himself as a respected performer of autobiographical solo shows. Amber undertakes a transition from a male to female body, and from a gay male to a straight female identity, holding a drag 'boobathon' to raise money for her surgery and ultimately seeking to launch herself as a singer and model. Holestar, biologically female, struggles with depression and with feelings of exclusion from the group. Pia, who accepts neither gender identity, suspends her involvement with the drag world and becomes preoccupied by conspiracy theories and visions of imminent apocalypse. DJ and reluctant drag performer John Sizzle good-humouredly manages his ambivalence about the scene, his own HIV status and his coming 45th birthday. Jonny himself flirts with mainstream recognition, hosting and performing gigs in front of audiences of thousands, but also getting sober and acknowledging the extent to which a youth devoted to hedonism has damaged him.

The friends reunite for a Hackney Empire event marking ten years since their Gay Bingo heyday.

The Dressmaker

Australia/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Jocelyn Moorhouse

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Like her heroine Tilly (though far less luridly), director Jocelyn Moorhouse has been away a good long while. Eighteen years have passed since her *Lear*-for-the-ladies *A Thousand Acres*, a gap that's been filled with screenwriting and producing on her director husband P.J. Hogan's films. Among admirers of the twisty, subtly ambiguous *Proof*, her Cannes-storming 1991 debut, hopes were high for this adaptation of Rosalie Ham's bestselling *Chocolat*-style fiction of revenge and haute couture in the rural New South Wales of 1951.

Moorhouse does indeed have a fine old time with *The Dressmaker*'s overstuffed tale, in which black sheep turned Paris dressmaker Tilly (a tough-over-tender Kate Winslet) returns to the tiny town that banished her for the murder of a schoolmate 20 years earlier. But, shaken into a giddy cocktail of genres (black comedy, romance, melodrama, tragedy and murder mystery, with a western garnish), it's a hot mess of a film, albeit one with an enjoyable high-and-handsome style to it, drawing both on Moorhouse's female-centric *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995) and on the sharp tragicomedy of Hogan's *Muriel's Wedding* (1994).

Moorhouse keenly capitalises on the book's theme of masquerade, present both in the transformational couture gowns that Tilly creates for the town gossips, and the toxic secrets lurking under their disapproving respectability. Unabashedly playful, screenwriter Hogan's wryly camp script revels in its faintly magical makeovers, turning an upstanding lawman into a covertly cross-dressing fashion plate and unleashing a deadly avenger in downtrodden politician's wife Marigold. Tilly, whose *Gilda*-style posing in strapless scarlet silk reduces a football final to chaos, has reinvented herself as a *noir*-ish femme fatale ("I'm back, you bastards" is her smoky first line, from under a tilted Paris hat). Yet Winslet manages to find a vulnerable core for her romance with Liam Hemsworth's local boy, the object of distinctly feminist 'boyeurism' as Tilly and her mother appraise his near-naked splendour during a suit fitting.

Margot Wilson's New Look couture costumes, whose strong jewel colours and siren stylings positively pop against the shabby, Russell Drysdale-inspired shacks and streets of dusty Dungatar, are suitably eye-catching. However, the mishmash of plotting that they decorate (a mother-daughter conflict for Tilly, a laboured unwinding of old mysteries) is significantly less stylish; occasionally, as in the sharp pathos of the remembered schoolyard death, it's positively disconcerting. On top of this, Moorhouse over-accessorises filmically, even throwing in Sergio Leone-style music cues for strained Wild West parallels. Forced to hold this rollicking, patchwork narrative together, her cast (including Hugo Weaving, frocked up again as in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*) adopt a broad, even caricatured style. Only Judy Davis, gloriously caustic as Tilly's outcast mother Mad Molly, manages a gamey naturalism and gets the lion's share of the laughs.

Most jarring of all is a series of big tonal shifts in the movie's third act, particularly a plot-freezing tragedy that feels deceptively like the story's natural end. Cheerfully ignoring this, the film winds bumpily on through shrill social comedy and an unexpectedly grand-guignol twist that's perhaps more audacious than satisfying. Moorhouse might have done better to translate Coco Chanel's maxim about fashion into her film: like architecture, it's all a matter of proportions.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Sue Maslin
Written by Jocelyn Moorhouse, P.J. Hogan, Based on the novel by Rosalie Ham
Director of Photography Donald M. McAlpine
Editor Jill Bilcock
Production Designer Roger Ford
Composer David Hirschfelder
Location Sound Recordist Andrew Ramage
Costume Designer Marion Boyce
Tilly Dunnage's Costumes Designed by Margot Wilson

©Film Art Media (The Dressmaker) Holdings Pty Ltd, White Hot Productions, Soundfirm, Film Victoria and Screen Australia

Production Companies Screen Australia and Ingenious Senior Film Fund present a Film Art Media production White Hot Productions, Film Victoria, Soundfirm, Motion Picture Lighting, Embankment Films Developed, produced and filmed with the assistance of Film Victoria Australia Developed with the assistance of Screen NSW Produced with the assistance of Ingenious Senior Film Fund and White Hot Productions Soundfirm Pty Ltd, Motion Picture Lighting Pty Ltd The Dressmaker Production Pty Ltd A Film Art Media production
Executive Producers Gavin Poolman, Michael Shyjka, Tim Haslam, Hugo Grumbar, Ian Kirk, Roger Savage, Karl Engeler, Greg Sitch, Fred Gaines, P.J. Hogan, Daryl Dellora
Film Extracts *Sunset Blvd.* (1950)

Cast
Kate Winslet Tilly Dunnage
Judy Davis Molly Dunnage
Liam Hemsworth Teddy McSwiney
Hugo Weaving Sergeant Farrat
Caroline Goodall Elsbeth Beaumont
Shane Bourne Councillor Evan Pettyman
Kerry Fox Beulah Harridene
Rebecca Gibney Muriel Pratt
Sacha Horler Una Pleasance
Shane Jacobson Alvin Pratt
Alison Whyte Marigold Pettyman
Genevieve Lemon Mae McSwiney
Barry Otto Mr Percival Almanac
Sarah Snook Gertrude Pratt

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

Australia, 1951. Couture dressmaker Tilly Dunnage returns from Paris to the tiny rural town from which she was sent away, aged ten, for killing classmate Stewart. She has no memory of the killing, but wants revenge. Despite hating her, the town gossips find themselves glamorously transformed by her creations. A rival dressmaker fails to end her business. Courted by farmhand Teddy, Tilly is gradually reconciled with her mad mother Molly. Tilly discovers that her teacher lied in her witness statement: Teddy's brother saw Stewart have a fatal accident while bullying Tilly. The real reason for Tilly's banishment was that she was the secret love child of Councillor Pettyman. Teddy and Tilly make love, but he dies shortly afterwards in a silo accident. Molly exhorts Tilly to win the regional drama costume competition and crush the gossips. Molly dies. The town's wife-beating chemist drowns because his crippled wife was high on Tilly's pain-relieving hash cookies; cross-dressing policeman Sergeant Farrat takes the rap to make amends for arresting Tilly as a child. Mrs Pettyman discovers that her husband has drugged and raped her nightly, and is Tilly's father. She kills him.

The town residents travel to the drama competition. They lose to a rival town's 'Mikado' dressed in Tilly's costumes, a rout arranged by Molly. While they're gone, Tilly burns the town down and leaves for Paris.

The Fear of 13

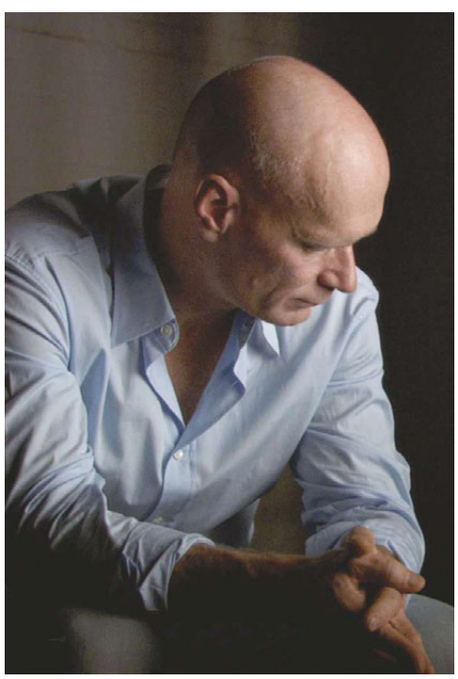
United Kingdom/USA 2015
Director: David Sington

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Triskaidekaphobia is the morbid fear of the number 13, supposedly traceable back to Judas being the 13th man at the Last Supper. It is not something that convicted murderer Nicholas Yarris suffers from as he bears witness to a remarkable life story in this documentary, which is shaped from a four-day filmed interview. As such, it might seem a somewhat oblique title, yet it soon becomes clear that what matters isn't whether Yarris is afflicted by the condition, but that he can say the word and know what it means.

Vocabulary gives Yarris the power through reading to enter so many other worlds – places he never imagined he'd visit after leaving school with only basic comprehension and misspending his youth stealing cars to fuel a serious drug habit. At 20 he was a homeless junkie, now he talks about his adventure into literacy, increasing his vocabulary with 40 or even 50 new words a day. As we cut back and forth from his testimony into contextualising images of significant places and suggestive rather than precise reconstruction, the film seems to be operating in the modern doc default mode established by Errol Morris in *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). Here, though, it's evidently not a lazy decision but a filmic form shaped by the charismatic teller, in which the extended monologue draws us into Yarris's emotive and evocative delivery (frankly, we could be watching a one-man stage show), while the cutaways cool the temperature down again so that the whole thing doesn't overheat too soon.

Director David Sington's structuring of Yarris's tale is equally canny, for although the opening titles refer to him as a convicted murderer who asked that his appeal process be terminated and his death sentence carried out, the film takes its time getting to that material – or indeed any explanation of the mysterious yet somehow talismanic images (a boy running in a forest, black gloves on a car seat, water spiralling down a shower



In his own words: Nicholas Yarris

plughole) unfolding behind the opening credits. Instead, Yarris, whose sculpted cheekbones and piercing gaze make him a natural in front of the camera, recounts an unlikely and seemingly tangential love story involving two prisoners due to be separated after a drugs find, establishing him as a sensitive, vigilant observer in his own right and signalling that the theme here is Yarris's humanity rather than the injustices that engulfed him.

Much of his story is so tragically unfortunate that it almost strains belief, yet in parallel with the detailing of his travails within the US justice system, Yarris makes it clear that his own inner journey, played out over two decades of incarceration, is the key to understanding him – because it's been a journey towards understanding and valuing himself. The discovery of reading is part of that, but there's romance too, and a potent reckoning with the dark events of his youth, all building to an almost beatific sense of self-realisation that's stronger than anything the authorities can throw at him. In a prison film like no other, the final scene beams with an illumination of Bressonian potency.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Christopher Riley
Director of Photography Clive North
Film Editors Robert Sternberg, David Fairhead, Horacio Queiro
Art Director Rosalind Boulton
Original Music Philip Sheppard
Sound Design Vince Watts

©DOX Productions Ltd

Production Companies Ten Mountain, Capital and Thirty Tigers in association with BBC present a DOX production A film by David Sington
Executive Producers Arthur S. DeMoulas, Nick Fraser, David Macias, Kate Townsend

Cast
Sammy Silverwatch young Nicholas Yarris
Anthony James adult Nicholas Yarris

In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor Dogwoof

In this documentary portrait, Nicholas Yarris, a prisoner who has spent more than 20 years on Death Row in Pennsylvania, tells his life story.

He recalls escaping to Florida during a court transfer, only to be rearrested after robbing a criminal associate, and looks back on the youthful car thefts committed to fund a drug habit that left him a homeless addict aged 20. Acquitted of trumped-up charges of kidnapping a police officer, he is subsequently convicted of raping and killing a housewife – on the basis that his blood group matches the forensic findings. In prison, the discovery of reading allows him to improve his literacy and acquire a new feeling of self-worth. He marries his charity visitor, who helps him campaign to have newly available DNA testing back up his claim that he is innocent. When vital evidence is damaged in the post, the resulting sense of disappointment causes the marriage to break up. Later, diagnosed with a rare form of hepatitis caused by prison dentistry, Yarris asks the judge to terminate his appeals process and expedite his death sentence. The latter insists, however, that all remaining DNA tests be carried out. The new discovery of a vital pair of gloves at last proves Yarris's innocence. He is released in 2004 after 21 years in jail. He moves to England, where he marries and has a daughter.

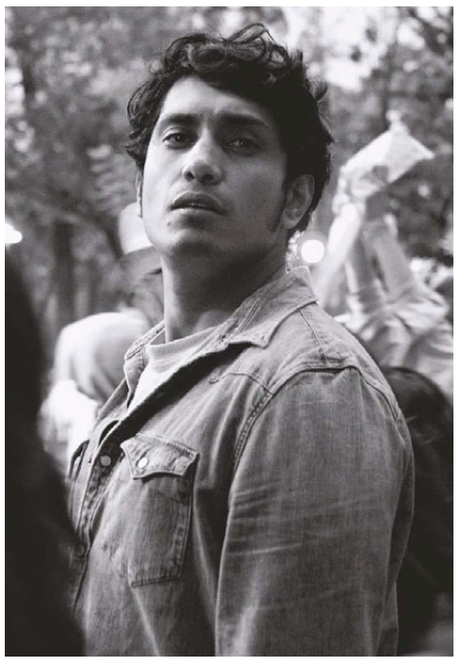
Güeros

Director: Alonso Ruizpalacios

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

If the ostensible purpose of this film's central road trip is to find and source an autograph from a once legendary, now reclusive folk singer, its cinematic purpose is both less focused and more ambitious. It examines one (real) student protest movement in terms of its social impact and its internal politics. It toys with conventions of art film and with stereotypes of Mexican identity on screen. It pays teasing tribute to the French New Wave, particularly the self-deconstructing political fables of Jean-Luc Godard. Jokes and meaningful asides are many, and just made to be quoted by film critics. A black-and-white Mexican arthouse film featuring non-professional actors mocks Mexican directors who "grab a bunch of beggars and shoot in black-and-white and say they're making art films". A film continually gesturing at history features a Bob Dylan-loving teenager in a 'Don't Look Back' T-shirt. A supporting character suddenly breaks the fourth wall in order to critique the script ("I think it's pretty bad, man").

All of this might be off-puttingly studenty and self-conscious, were it not for a supple, inventive surrounding narrative and a quartet of lead performances that buzz with sincerity and energy. *Güeros* plays narrative tricks – not least with a dynamic opening that gestures towards a different sort of film entirely, only to be abandoned wholesale when the real protagonist happens along – but still feels sensitive and intelligent rather than self-satisfied. Director Alonso Ruizpalacios both critiques and pays tribute to celebrated Mexican films of recent years, among them Alfonso Cuarón's commercial game-changer *Y tu mamá también* (2001) and Fernando Eimbcke's *Duck Season* (2004), as well as the strain of bittersweet, whimsical American indie kickstarted and influenced by *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984). But Ruizpalacios's film has a thrum of dark nervous energy all its own, which is charged by the complicated class and racial attitudes that surround brothers Fede (Tenoch Huerta) and Tomás (Sebastián Aguirre) and crescendoes with the former's intermittent panic attacks. For student protest leader Ana (Ilse Salas), meanwhile, the edginess is supplied by the fact that all the leftist solidarity in the world apparently can't prevent her male comrades from shouting lascivious abuse at her while she's addressing the crowds.



History lessons: Tenoch Huerta

It's almost a given in a film so averse to easy sentiment that the wild-goose chase for singer Epigmenio Cruz (he who, according to legend, "once made Bob Dylan cry") will end in disappointment. Rather than seeming negative or nihilistic, however, the low-key way in which the quest plays out provides a satisfying final twist on the film's layered observations about youth and social position, love and sincerity, causes and commitment. Fittingly for a feature concerned with the emotional resonance of remembered songs, the sound design and music are thoughtful and striking throughout, as is the black-and-white cinematography by Damian García.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Ramiro Ruiz
Written by Alonso Ruizpalacios, Gibrán Portela
Director of Photography Damián García
Editing Yibrán Asuad, Ana García
Production Designer Sandra Cabriada
Original Music Tomás Barreiro
Sound Design Zulu, Gabriel Reyna, Kiyoshi Osawa
Costume Designer Ingrid Sac

Production Companies Mundial, Catatonia Cine and Conaculta in co-production with Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Difusión Cultural UNAM, Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos
Executive Producers Jose Felipe Coria Coral, Gael García Bernal

Cast
Tenoch Huerta Federico, 'Sombra'
Sebastián Aguirre Tomás
Ilse Salas Ana
Leonardo Ortizgris Santos
Alfonso Charpener Epigmenio Cruz

Black & White [1.37:1]
Subtitles

Distributor New Wave Films

Veracruz, Mexico, 1999. When teenager Tomás gets into trouble one too many times, his mother sends him to stay with his older brother Fede, a student in Mexico City. College is suspended due to a student strike, and Fede and his friend Santos are holed up in their squalid apartment, listening to Ana, a woman Fede is interested in, broadcasting on the striking students' radio station. Tomás persuades them to undertake a road trip in search of a folk singer from their childhood, Epigmenio Cruz, who is rumoured to be ill and in a local hospital. At the hospital, a doctor tells them that Cruz has checked out, but passes on a wallet that he has left behind. From the wallet they learn that Cruz now works at the zoo. They go to the university, where Ana is speaking at a fractious rally, and collect her. The group attend a film industry party and cause a disturbance by jumping in the pool. They go to the zoo, where they find Cruz's girlfriend, who passes on some of his artwork – illustrated menus from a restaurant in Texcoco. They head there, but on the way their car is struck by a brick dropped from a bridge by a young boy, smashing the windscreen. A detour to find the boy's parents leads them to the restaurant and Cruz. Fede delivers a speech about his significance in their lives, during which Cruz falls asleep. Ana and Fede kiss in the car, but when they return into the heart of a student demonstration, he loses her in the crowd.

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BFI SHOP

The Hallow

United Kingdom/USA/Ireland 2015
Director: Corin Hardy
Certificate 15 96m 55s

See Industry, page 14

Reviewed by Kim Newman

With its frequent nods to Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981) – from a book of fairy lore that resembles Raimi's Necronomicon to the in-joke credit for 'fakeShemps' – Corin Hardy's Anglo-Irish creature feature sets out its shingle fairly blatantly... though the film it most resembles is the 2010 remake of *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*, which similarly assailed its family of outsiders with nightmarish pixies out to steal children for transformation into monsters.

The film is slightly torn between, on the one hand, the slow-building, atmospheric evocation of jittery folk living in wild woods amid unpredictable inhabitants and, on the other, turning up the horrors full-blast with monster attacks. It offers a spin on traditional Irish tales about the little people, who are here regular size and look a lot like the crawlers of *The Descent* (2005) – though they can also extrude bark-like splinters and may in fact be humans taken over by a viral fungus with its own expansionist agenda (or need for self-defence, given that the central protagonist is the advance man for a logging firm looking to depredate their environment).

Joseph Mawle, not a conventional leading man, is an interesting choice for hero Adam, who new-mannishly carries his baby son in a sling as he works in the woods, chalking X-marks on fungus-infected trees that will have to be cut down and unwittingly exposing little Finn to supernatural dangers. Understandably, Adam doesn't pay attention to the ranting local loon who tells him to stay away from the woods and whose warnings get his back up so much that he becomes ludicrously determined to stay on, even after he has been forced to believe in fairies. Less distinctive is Bojana Novakovic as the wife who has to learn to trust her mutating husband while fighting to defend her home and then rescue her child – though heavy signposting of the changeling myth suggests this won't be as easy as diving in a lake and bringing home a baby-shaped being.

A problem with homage-heavy horror is that it's difficult to distinguish between fond use of genre conventions and lazy reliance on clichés.

Afraid of the bark: Bojana Novakovic

Here, the omens are plain from the outset, so there's a certain sense of marking time between set-up and payoff: taking the bars off all the windows is ill-advised; the family dog that keeps haring off into the woods will come to a bad end; a long speech about the (real) phenomenon of 'zombie ants' will be thematically relevant; and the long pan over logging activity under the closing credits will end with a spooky punchline.

With its stop-start pacing, risky use of a pickaxe and eyeball-threatening splinters, *The Hallow* evokes the curate's-egg work of Lucio Fulci in his *Zombie Flesh Eaters*/*The House by the Cemetery* mode. In the universe of this kind of horror, it's a mistake to complain about inconsistencies – we're in a realm that can be ethereally fantastical and physically gruesome at the same time, which is why we get fungus spurs growing out of Adam's face and shoulder in clinically nasty fashion, even as the threat seems to be nebulous and supernatural. Cora, the neighbour's transformed daughter, is a sponge-faced apparition in line with Fulci's horrific-pathetic child creatures. There's a strange absence here in that no changelings seem to have been returned to their families, though a substitution trick is played on Adam and his wife – with some double-bluff business in the finale about which baby has been saved. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Joe Neurauter
Felipe Marino
Screenplay
Corin Hardy
Felipe Marino
Story
Corin Hardy
Felipe Marino
Tom DeVille
Director of Photography
Martijn Van Broekhuizen
Editor
Nick Emerson
Production Designer
Mags Linnane
Original Music
James Gosling
Sound Designer
Steve Fanagan
Costume Designer
Lara Campbell

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Production Companies
Occupant Entertainment presents in association with Hyperion Media Group, Prescience, Altus Media (Five) and Electric Shadow
With the Participation of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board
In co-production with Fantastic Films
An Occupant Entertainment Production
A film by Corin Hardy
Produced with the support of investment incentives for the Irish film industry provided by the Government of Ireland
Executive Producers
Michael Mailis
Paul Brett
Tim Smith
James Swarbrick
Keith Calder
Will Clarke
Corin Hardy
Kate Sharp

Cast
Joseph Mawle
Adam
Bojana Novakovic
Claire
Michael McElhatton
Colm Donnelly
Michael Smiley
Garda Davey
Joseph Rodgers
James Rodgers
Finn
Wren Hardy
young Finn
Charlotte Williams
Cora Hallow

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
E1 Films

Rural Ireland, the present. Tree surgeon Adam takes a job assessing a recently purchased ancient woodland, and moves with his wife Claire and baby son Finn into an isolated house in the area. His neighbour Colm warns him aggressively to stay out of the woods. After Adam reports a mysteriously broken window, a policeman tells him that the locals believe the woods are home to the Hallow, malign fairies who steal children and leave changelings in their place. Adam discovers a strange, fast-growing form of fungus. The house comes under attack from the Hallow, and Adam is infected by the fungus, which begins to transform him into one of the creatures. Finn is snatched but Claire rescues him, though Adam is convinced she has brought back a changeling. Adam sacrifices himself to ensure that the real child is returned to his mother.

Hand Gestures

Italy 2015
Director: Francesco Clerici

Reviewed by Alex Dudok de Wit

Hand Gestures opens, after brief expository titles, with a shot of a lifesize pink waxwork of a dog lying on a table. It closes with an identical canine sculpture, this one in bronze, being laid to rest among a pack of similarly fashioned metal pooches. This fly-on-the-wall documentary tells the story of how master artisan Velasco Vitali and his colleagues turn the former sculpture into the latter within the confines of their rugged foundry in Milan. We watch them as they go through the motions of a casting process that – as those titles tell us – hasn't much changed since the Bronze Age. The camera stays fixed for the most part, focusing on the artists' hands at work; there is no voiceover or non-diegetic music; the subjects are not interviewed.

This is observational filmmaking at its most fundamental. It is a far cry from those documentaries that try to flesh out the interest of an artisanal craft by profiling the people who practise it, such as *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (2011). No effort is made to place the profession in a social context, unlike, say, Georges Franju's 1949 abattoir-set *Blood of the Beasts* (which this film sometimes resembles visually). By stripping away almost all context and sticking to a simple linear narrative of creation, *Hand Gestures* lends itself rather to mystical interpretations. Crucially, the only information we are given refers to the long tradition of Vitali's method of casting, passed on unchanged from one generation to the next. A more fitting reference point is Michelangelo Frammartino's docu-fiction *Le quattro volte* (2010), in which the workaday routines of goatherds and charcoal-burners in southern Italy form a picture of cosmic continuity behind the human life cycle.

By this point, some readers will hear alarm bells ringing. When this magazine's Nick James bemoaned the ascendancy of a ponderous, minimalist style in arthouse cinema five years ago, his comments triggered a backlash against the so-called Slow Cinema that continues today.

In their element: Velasco Vitali

The question at stake is to what extent a film should be allowed to try the audience's patience – by downplaying plot and keeping to a measured pace – for the sake of effect, whether aesthetic or political or otherwise. If your answer is "not at all", then *Hand Gestures* is not for you – you're unlikely to last beyond the early shots of plaster drying.

It should be noted that, given its approach, *Hand Gestures* is not particularly slow. It clocks in at a lean 76 minutes, the editing is snappy and every scene demonstrates a crucial part of the process; there are no redundant shots, no Lav Diaz-style ten-minute takes. Director Francesco Clerici, an art theorist with only one short documentary to his name, has a knack for homing in on revealing details: the safety signs that suggest nasty occupational hazards, the hand tucked behind the back that speaks of a strict professional protocol. He is a very efficient filmmaker.

Hand Gestures, then, is an already condensed account of an impossibly time-consuming procedure. Whether it could have been even shorter is a moot point; what's certain is that every minute shaved off the running time would have lessened the almost physical impact of the last scene, in which the finished sculpture is placed in its proper context. The bronze dog is silent and inert, yet to us the animal is alive, because we know how each chink in its hide and each fold in its limbs came to be. This is the strange thrill of the creative process that *Hand Gestures* seeks to convey, knowing full well that any attempt at explanation would only detract from it. S

Credits and Synopsis

Production
Velasco Vitali
Filmed by
Francesco Clerici
Edited by
Francesco Clerici
Original Soundtrack
Claudio Gotti
Sound Editing
Michele Brambilla
Fortuna Fontò
Francesco Mangini
Mattia Pontremoli
Emanuele Pullini

Production Companies
Velasco Vitali, Fonderia Artistica Battaglia present in collaboration with Comune di Milano, FAI Fondo Ambiente Italiano, Fondazione Cologni dei Mestieri d'Arte
Production: Velasco Vitali, Fonderia Artistica Battaglia
In partnership with Comune di Milano, FAI Fondo Ambiente Italiano, Fondazione Cologni dei Mestieri d'Arte
Executive Producers
Jon Barrenechea
Ena Dozo
Matteo Visconti di Modrone

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Hand Gestures Films

Italian theatrical title
Il gesto delle mani
Hand Gestures

This documentary tracks the creation of one of Italian artist Velasco Vitali's renowned bronze dog sculptures in his Milan foundry, the Fonderia Artistica Battaglia. The sculpture is made by the millennia-old technique of lost-wax casting, whereby the bronze is cast using a plaster mould modelled in turn on a preliminary wax sculpture. We witness the mould being made and used to fashion a ceramic shell replicating the wax original; this is then filled with liquid metal, which is allowed to cool before the shell is hammered off, revealing the rough casting. The casting is smoothed with a hot metal iron until the sculpture is ready for display. The film shows the procedure objectively, without voiceover narration or interviews. Although Vitali and his colleagues are present in most of the shots, their conversation is limited to a few terse instructions.

He Named Me Malala

Cayman Islands/USA/United Arab Emirates 2015
Director: Davis Guggenheim
Certificate PG 87m 27s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Davis Guggenheim's documentary portrait of 18-year-old Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist for female education whose story came to global attention in 2012 when she narrowly survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban, is 'inspired by' its formidable subject's own memoir (written with journalist Christina Lamb), *I Am Malala*. The marked switch in emphasis of this film's title – with its intimations of an authoritative male presence – at first suggests a crucial loss of agency for its central figure. But as it turns out, *He Named Me Malala* functions as a profile of both Malala and, to a lesser extent, her father Ziauddin, a teacher and human rights campaigner. As we learn in a lushly animated prologue set to Malala's voiceover narration, Ziauddin named his daughter after Malalai of Maiwand, a legendary Pashtun poet and warrior who rallied a demoralised army to unlikely victory through the force of her words. Subsequent flashbacks employing the same storybook visual texture show the young Malala being brought up to view education and free speech as sacrosanct. However, when Guggenheim wonders if her activism was preordained, she firmly puts him straight: "My father didn't choose my life, I did – he *named* me."

While there's little doubt that Malala is an exceptional individual by any reckoning, Guggenheim's film can seem like an overawed tribute, even when it's looking to offer an intimate study of the resolutely down-to-earth teenager behind the media hubbub – it's as hagiographical in this sense as the reverent depiction of Al Gore in the director's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). It moves fairly fluidly between past – stylised reconstructions of Malala's early life in her native Swat Valley – and present – candid footage of Malala and her family getting to grips with a new life in England, plus glimpses of her ongoing worldwide activism.

As the film relates, Malala was a 12-year-old schoolgirl when her dissenting voice first traversed international borders. Clandestine blogs smuggled to the BBC gave accounts of the Taliban's occupation of Swat and its increasingly hardline erosion of liberties in the region. Malala recalls how the charismatic Mullah Fazlullah initially promised a progressive society under Taliban rule, a vow brutally reneged on later as schools were bombed, television and music banned and police officers regularly murdered in the streets. Ziauddin, meanwhile, recounts how he continued to make protest speeches, even while friends were being systematically silenced. When the family are forced to relocate temporarily to a refugee camp for their own safety, it's not fear that Malala remembers but frustration at being deprived of an education and her beloved books.

Captured at home and at school in Birmingham, Malala is an amused, forthright figure, chastising her mischievous younger brothers and Guggenheim alike as he quizzes her about her celebrity crushes. She talks frankly about her recovery from the debilitating injuries she sustained in the attempt on her life, and of her overwhelming yearning and desire to return to Swat, no matter that she remains on the Taliban's hit list. She also notes that, while

Public speaking: Malala Yousafzai

Ziauddin has adapted to western life with relative ease, her mother – who speaks little English – has struggled to integrate with her new surroundings. This, Malala insists, is symptomatic of the limits imposed on women's education in her homeland.

We see fragments of the real Swat in grainy news footage, but more frequently it's rendered – through Jason Carpenter's animation – as an almost mythical place, a corrupted Shangri-La that's now out of bounds. It's an evocative storytelling device but, as Thomas Newman's plaintive score swells in the background, also somewhat twee. However, the first-person narration helps to add a greater sense of authenticity, while the material's inherent accessibility will likely prove appealing to those younger audiences who could be inspired by Malala's story and message. Her passion for education is one evidently shared by Guggenheim, as anyone who has seen his *Waiting for 'Superman'* (2010), a trenchant critique of the American school system, can attest. And what lingers most here is the focus on protecting learning and individuality at any cost – a baton passed from Ziauddin to Malala. Still, the latter's defiantly humble, level-headed manner is a little at odds with the film made about her, a polished celebration that sometimes comes close to sanctifying its subject. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Walter Parkes
Laurie MacDonald
Davis Guggenheim
Inspired by the book *I Am Malala The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb
Director of Photography
Erich Roland
Edited by
Greg Finton
Brian Johnson
Brad Fuller
Music
Thomas Newman

Supervising Sound Editor
Skip Lievsay
Animation Design
Jason Carpenter

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Production Companies
Fox Searchlight Pictures in association with Image Nation Abu Dhabi, Participant Media and National Geographic Channel present a Parkes-MacDonald and a Little Room production
Executive Producers
Mohammed Al Mubarak
Michael Garin
Jeff Skoll
Shannon Dill

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox International (UK)

A documentary about Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist for female education and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who in 2012 survived a near-fatal assassination attempt by the Taliban. The film follows Malala as she and her family adapt to a new life in the UK. We learn about her ongoing international activism, while animated reconstructions chronicle her earlier life in Pakistan's Swat Valley.

Hotel Transylvania 2

USA 2015
Director: Genndy Tartakovsky
Certificate U 89m 5s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Like George Miller's outstanding *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Hotel Transylvania 2* is a sequel that strips its narrative down to a barebones there-and-back road journey. Unfortunately, that's where the comparisons end, as this hollow CGI cash-grab fails to be visually or emotionally arresting.

Dismayed that his half-human, half-vampire grandson Dennis (voiced by Asher Blinkoff) hasn't grown fangs, Dracula (Adam Sandler) takes him on a ride with his monster friends. Eventually, Dracula comes to terms with his grandson's humanity, and repeats some points about how it's good to like everyone, regardless of who they are... or something.

Still, there are plenty of little moments of humour – a beefy, bearded hipster is mistaken for a werewolf, a giant spider does a spin class, a spooky forest has been revitalised thanks to an urban renewal programme and is now full of joggers – that make it a not totally horrible experience for any adults who go along for the ride. It's doubtful, however, that kids will understand or care about lampooning any of those things, which is unfortunate considering the 'just for kids' jokes are about as weak as the film's overarching 'message'.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michelle Murdocca
Written by
Robert Smigel
Adam Sandler
Editor
Catherine Apple
Production Designer
Michael Kurinsky
Music
Mark Mothersbaugh
Re-recording Mixers
Tom Johnson
Michael Semanick
Senior Animation Supervisor
Alan Hawkins
Imagery and Animation
Sony Pictures Imageworks Inc.
Sony Pictures Imageworks Canada Inc.

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Production Companies
Columbia Pictures presents in association with LStar Capital a Sony Pictures Animation film
Executive Producers
Adam Sandler
Allen Covert
Robert Smigel
Ben Waisbren

Voice Cast

Adam Sandler
Dracula
Andy Samberg
Jonathan, 'Johnny'
Selena Gomez
Mavis
Kevin James
Frankenstein
Steve Buscemi
Wayne
David Spade
Griffin
Keegan-Michael Key
Murray
Asher Blinkoff
Dennis
Fran Drescher
Eunice
Molly Shannon
Wanda
Megan Mullally
Grandma Linda
Nick Offerman
Grandpa Mike
Dana Carvey
Dana
Rob Riggle
Bela
Mel Brooks
Vlad

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

Transylvania, seven years ago. Vampire Mavis marries her human boyfriend Johnny with her father Dracula's approval. A year later, their son Dennis is born. The film then flashes forward to shortly before Dennis's fifth birthday. To his grandfather's dismay, Dennis still hasn't grown fangs. Mavis considers moving to Santa Cruz so that Dennis won't feel like an outsider. While Mavis and Johnny are in California, Dracula takes Dennis on a road trip with his monster friends to help him get in touch with his vampire side. At his birthday party, a human-hating bat monster threatens one of his friends, and Dennis's fangs finally sprout, allowing him to save her.

Kill Your Friends

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Owen Harris

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

If *Kill Your Friends* were an album, it might be described thus: a briefly arresting opening salvo followed by a bunch of dirges that all sound the same. Such is the eventual numbing monotony of John Niven's adaptation of his own gleefully debauched novel.

Niven spent much of the Britpop-charged 90s as an A&R executive for London Records. His fictional proxy here is Steven Stelfox (Nicholas Hoult), a satanic cartoon whose noxious subjective narration, maniacal consumption and lust for power carry on from where Patrick Bateman (*American Psycho*) and Bruce Robertson (Irvine Welsh's *Filth*) left off. Hell-bent on securing a coveted head of A&R post at his record label, and willing to manipulate and murder his nominally less hateful colleagues in the process, Stelfox is contemptuous of most music and the public who consume it.

Hoult lays on the sinister smarm efficiently, and the film's lampooning of the industry – Spice Girls facsimiles, chronically experimental rappers, twee Scandinavian indie-poppers – occasionally raises a smile. But this debut feature from TV director Owen Harris (*Black Mirror*, *Misfits*) is as slick and empty as the milieu it stridently burlesques, so desperate to shock and repel that any potential satirical bite is muffled. Unlike the world it strains to skewer, *Kill Your Friends* is relentlessly one-note.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Len Blavatnik
Gregor Cameron
Will Clarke
Screenplay
John Niven
Based on his novel
Director of Photography
Gustav Danielsson
Editor
Bill Smedley
Production Designer
Charlotte Pearson
Composer
Junkie XL
Production Sound Mixer
Henry Milliner
Costume Designer
Susie Coulthard

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Production Companies
Altitude Film Entertainment and AI Film present in association with Pinewood Pictures a UNIGRAM/Altitude Film Entertainment production
Developed with the assistance of Sony Music
Executive Producers
Andy Mayson
Mike Runagall
Vince Holden
Aviv Giladi
Ben Giladi
Kate Buckley
Nicholas Hoult
Steve Norris
Ivan Dunleavy
Danny Perkins
Dan MacRae
Amanda Ghost
Johnny Vaughan
James Sulley

Cast

Nicholas Hoult
Steven Stelfox
Tom Riley
Tony Parker-Hall
Georgia King
Rebecca
Craig Roberts
Darren
Joseph Mawle
James Trellick
James Corden
Roger Waters
Jim Piddock
Derek Sommers
Ed Hogg
DC Woodham
Ed Skrein
Rent
Ella Smith
Nikki
Osy Ikhile
Rage
Dustin Demri-Burns
David Schnieder
Rosanna Arquette
Barbara
Moritz Bleibtreu
Rudi

In Colour

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

London, 1997. Record label executive Steven Stelfox is determined to secure his company's head of A&R position, but the job goes to his colleague Roger instead. Stelfox murders Roger. DC Woodham, an aspiring musician, grows suspicious of Stelfox. Stelfox's hated rival Tony Parker-Hall replaces Roger. Stelfox is blackmailed both by his secretary Rebecca and by Woodham, who demands a record deal. Stelfox frames Parker-Hall as a paedophile; he kills Rebecca and makes Woodham dispose of the body. He is made head of A&R.

The Lady in the Van

United Kingdom/USA 2015
Director: Nicholas Hytner
Certificate 12A 103m 58s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

"You wouldn't get Harold Pinter pushing a van down the street," grumbles the writer Alan Bennett in this adaptation of his stage play and memoir *The Lady in the Van*. Helmed by the play's director Nicholas Hytner, this film version retains much of Bennett's self-deprecating humour as he grudgingly invites Miss Mary Shepherd to park her home – a van stuffed with carrier bags – in his front drive.

That Miss Shepherd is played by Maggie Smith – who also starred in the stage play – is this film's biggest strength. Who better to portray an irascible, imperious, self-entitled, ungrateful, elderly English woman? And who better to draw out the comedy in Mary's withering put-downs, often aimed at the very people trying to help her.

While Smith has the showier role, Alex Jennings does a fine job essentially playing two parts (performed in the stage play by two different actors): Bennett the desk-bound writer and Bennett the neighbour, the latter obliged to interact with an array of amusing characters while his author counterpart looks on. It's a bold device that highlights the internal conflicts as Bennett tussles between personal preferences and public spirit, largely driven by guilt as his own mother is put into a home. Guilt is a characteristic Bennett shares with Catholic Mary, whose later life has been dominated by assumed culpability for a car accident – a sin for which she frequently attends confession.

But the double-Bennett device comes with its problems. It's one of a number of distracting meta-tendencies that not only draw attention to the writing process but openly question the veracity of the narrative unfolding on screen. While initially a witty reflection on artistic licence, it creates an increasing distance from the characters and undermines the potential for drama – though with its broad comedy, busy soundtrack and jaunty pace, *The Lady in the Van* emphatically chooses humour over heart. It's an amusing, amiable watch, but resolutely light, using subjects such as Mary's delusions and Bennett's homosexuality purely for laughs. Moments of reflection are brief, and the bond between Bennett and Shepherd is so grudging it is rarely affecting.

Perhaps happy to embrace the visual possibilities of cinema, Hytner opts for a surreal, grandiose finale, with mixed results. It's in the most mundane, ordinary moments that *The*

Paint my wagon: Maggie Smith

Lady in the Van flourishes – Bennett describing the pungent smell of his subject, for example, or musing on how she goes to the toilet. "When I write about this, people will say it's too much about shit," says Bennett at one point, but such grimy reality serves the film better than its more ambitious stylistic excursions. It's tempting to wonder what a filmmaker more committed to realism would have done with such a tale – but Miss Shepherd didn't happen to Mike Leigh. Nor, as Bennett points out, did she happen to Pinter. That would have been another story altogether.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kevin Loader
Nicholas Hytner
Damian Jones
Screenplay
Alan Bennett
from his memoir
Director of Photography
Andrew Dunn
Editor
Tariq Anwar
Production Designer
John Beard
Music by/ Conductor
George Fenton
Production Sound Mixer
Rashad Omar
Costume Designer
Natalie Ward

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Production Companies
Tristar Pictures presents
BBC Films presents

Executive Producers
Christine Langan
Ed Wethered
Charles Moore
Miles Ketley

Cast
Maggie Smith
Miss Mary Shepherd
Alex Jennings
Alan Bennett
Jim Broadbent
Underwood
Frances De La Tour
Mrs Vaughan Williams
Roger Allam
Rufus
Deborah Findlay
Pauline
Gwen Taylor
Mam
Pandora Colin
Fiona Perry
Nicholas Burns
Giles Perry
David Calder
Leo Fairchild
Marion Bailey
housekeeper at convent
Cecilia Noble
Miss Briscoe, social worker
Claire Foy
Lois, social worker

Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

A woman driver has an accident, blood splatters across the windscreen. A policeman sees her driving off. Titles announce a "mostly" true story.

London, 1970. Writer Alan Bennett moves into Gloucester Crescent in Camden Town. He has frequent conversations with himself (the film depicts Bennett the writer/observer and Bennett the neighbour as two separate individuals). The woman seen earlier, now elderly, is living in a van in Gloucester Crescent, tolerated by the local residents. Known as Miss Mary Shepherd, she is a former wartime ambulance driver and nun. The same policeman visits her; he is blackmailing her for cash. Eventually Bennett offers his driveway as a place for Miss Shepherd to park her van; it turns out to be an indefinite arrangement. Mary occasionally visits a seaside town and sees someone who, it transpires, is her brother. Bennett discovers that Mary was a pianist but cannot bear music, having been reprimanded by nuns for playing. Bennett visits the local convent, but the nuns refuse to offer Mary assistance. A social worker visits, and Mary is persuaded to go to a day centre for a bath. There, she plays the piano. Bennett visits Mary's brother, who says that his sister is in fact called Margaret Fairchild, and was once committed to an asylum. Mary/Margaret is found dead in her van the following morning. After the funeral, she appears in the graveyard and talks to both Alan Bennetts, introducing them to the motorcyclist who died in the accident. God and angels usher her up to heaven.

Camden, present day. Bennett is shown walking up to the film set, where the actors watch a plaque being installed to commemorate "The Lady in the Van, who lived here 1974-1989".

Momentum

South Africa/USA/Spain 2015
Director: Stephen Campanelli
Certificate 15 96m 5s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Slick action thrillers roll off the production line so frequently that it's easy to forget how difficult it is to make a decent one. This film, if nothing else, reminds us.

Debut director Stephen Campanelli has decades of experience as an award-winning cameraman, and plenty of contacts in the business. But while this has given him access to a quality cast, it hasn't enabled him to secure a workable script: Adam Marcus and Debra Sullivan have simply turned in a half-baked jumble of set-piece chases, fights and torture scenes vaguely organised around a missing hard drive containing the evil atrocity plans of a US senator (Morgan Freeman). Ex-spy Alex (Olga Kurylenko) has the drive, and so she will be relentlessly pursued by sadistic bad guy Mr Washington (James Purefoy) until the inevitable explosive denouement.

While the film is nicely shot, the editing is choppy, the characters are wooden, the 'witty' dialogue is clunky and the whole ludicrous premise feels like it's been on a shelf since 1995 – especially since crucial plot points rely on the use of landlines and one character's lack of any kind of computer in his apartment. Surprisingly, the South African setting isn't exploited at all: the action takes place in anonymous airports, hotels and industrial warehouses, emphasising just how generic the project is. Bafflingly, the ending suggests that a sequel was planned – that really won't be happening.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Anton Ernst
Producers
Donald A. Barton
Meshack Molope
Written by
Adam Marcus
Debra Sullivan
Director of Photography
Glen MacPherson
Editor
Doobie White
Production Designer
Tom Gubb
Music Composed and Conducted by
Laurent Eyquem
Sound Re-recording Mixers
Scott Millan
Greg P. Russell
Costume Designer
Dihantus Engelbrecht
Stunt Co-ordinator
Antony Stone

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Production Companies
Thaba Media & Azari Media in association with Moonrise Pictures, the South African Film Fund, National Film and Video Foundation, Silverline 360 an Anton Ernst production
A film by Stephen Campanelli
Produced with the assistance of the Department of Trade and Industry South Africa
Executive Producers
Tai Duncan
Paul Schiff
Raja Collins
Colette Aguilar
Charl Van Der Merwe
Alen Ivazian
Kim Jawanda

Cast
Olga Kurylenko
Alexis Faraday, 'Alex'
James Purefoy
Mr Washington
Hlomla Dandala
Mr Madison
Lee-Anne Summers
Penny Fuller
Brendan Murray
Raymond Kelly
Karl Thaning
Douglas MacArthur
Greg Kriek
Mr Monroe
Shelly Nicole
Ms Clinton
Richard Lothian
Mr Jefferson
Morgan Freeman
senator

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Signature Entertainment

South Africa, present day. Spy-turned-superthief Alex Farraday accidentally steals the secret plans for a terrorist outrage that is being put in place by a rogue US senator. Ruthless 'cleaner' Mr Washington is sent to track her down and kill her; Alex exploits his tendency to underestimate her and brings about his death in a police shootout, escaping on a plane using a false passport. But the senator is still at large.

My Nazi Legacy

United Kingdom 2015
Director: David Evans
Certificate PG 95m 37s

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

"Imagine what it must be like to grow up as the child of a mass murderer," says lawyer Philippe Sands at the start of this fascinating and disturbing documentary. "To live with such a parent must impose the most terrible of burdens." It is precisely this burden that Sands investigates in *My Nazi Legacy*, directed by David Evans.

Their film isn't exactly breaking new ground – there have been countless books, documentaries and articles about the generation that followed Hitler. Last year, for example, saw the release of Stefan Ruzowitzky's *Radical Evil*, in which the Oscar-winning director asked why ordinary Germans colluded in mass killing. But Sands' documentary comes at the subject from an intimate and very personal point of view. It is dotted with photographs and old home-movie footage of its protagonists when they were young. Their fathers may have been acolytes of Hitler but the images of christenings and summer holidays look much like those of anyone else.

What makes *My Nazi Legacy* so intriguing is that its three subjects have such different reasons for becoming involved in the film. They all get on well with each other but their opinions are frequently at odds. Niklas Frank describes his Nazi official father Hans Frank, who was tried and hanged at Nuremberg, as "politically responsible for the ghettos and the concentration camps on the soil of Poland". He has utter contempt for his father and seems to find relief in speaking out in public at every opportunity about his loathing of him. Horst von Wächter, by contrast, persists in seeing his father Otto as an essentially decent man, caught up in events beyond his control. This exasperates Sands, who met the two men when he was researching a book on the origins of genocide and had already found plenty of documentation implicating Otto von Wächter in Nazi atrocities.

The Vienna-born Horst seems a gentle and intelligent man and yet Sands simply can't convince him that his father was culpable. In his attempt to force Horst to accept his father's guilt, Sands uses not only his skills as a lawyer but also personal testament about what his own family endured. Many members of Sands' family died as a direct result of the actions of his subjects' fathers; at one point in the film he takes Niklas and Horst to Ukraine, where they visit the synagogue that was used by his ancestors, and whose interior was burnt by the Germans. Niklas, who introduced Horst to Sands and is ostensibly his friend, becomes increasingly irritated by his denials: "He should know better," he sneers. "I really despise him, like my father. In my opinion, Horst will become a new Nazi in the end."

Horst's motives for participating in the documentary are hard to work out. He seemingly feels pride in his family legacy and is desperate to stand up for his father, coming up with convoluted and sentimental arguments to defend his actions. There is something equally extreme about Niklas's determination to denounce his father at every opportunity – we sense that his public protestations of hatred are, at least partly, a coping mechanism. The unspoken question is what, if any, character traits the sons have inherited from their fathers.

Sins of the father: *My Nazi Legacy*

My Nazi Legacy is a troubling film that doesn't offer any consoling conclusions. Its three protagonists are all tormented in their own way, searching for some kind of absolution or insight that we know at the outset they are not going to find. The filmmakers include an image of Hans Frank as a little boy, looking beatific and innocent, and then show his son in the court at Nuremberg where Frank was condemned to death. "It's a happy room for me and for the world," Niklas suggests – but he looks utterly distraught and confused as he does so.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Finola Dwyer Amanda Posey **Written by** Philippe Sands **Directors of Photography** Sam Hardy Philipp Blaubach Matt Gray **Edited by** David Charap **Music** Malcolm Lindsay **Sound Recordist** Matthew Powell

©Wildgaze Films Ltd, The British Film Institute **Production Companies** BFI and BBC Storyville present a Wildgaze Films production in association with Willow Films Supported by the MEDIA Programme of the European Union Made with the support of Stuart Wheeler, BFI's Film Fund **Executive Producers** Philippe Sands David Evans Nick Fraser

In Colour [1.85:1] Part-subtitled

Distributor Altitude Film Distribution

A documentary following the human rights lawyer Philippe Sands as he befriends Niklas Frank and Horst von Wächter, elderly men who are the sons of prominent Nazis Hans Frank and Otto von Wächter. Many members of Sands' own family died in the Holocaust and he is keen to investigate the men's attitudes towards their fathers. Niklas Frank detests and despises Hans Frank, whereas Horst von Wächter is ambivalent; even in the face of what appears to be overwhelming evidence, he refuses to accept that his father was a war criminal.

My Skinny Sister

Sweden/Germany/Norway 2015
Director: Sanna Lenken
Certificate 15 94m 46s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

An adoring younger sister in the throes of her first crush feels painfully distanced from her poised, seemingly perfect older sister as she locks herself away: *My Skinny Sister* could be described as a live-action, realist version of *Frozen* (2013), the surprise world-beating Disney animation that focused filmgoers' attention on sisterhood. Katja, the older sister, even shares with that film's Elsa an identification with ice: she is a figure-skater, and her involvement in a highly competitive – and highly feminised – sport has pushed her into an eating disorder. As in *Frozen*, it is the spirited younger sister who sees her condition empathetically and pushes her to seek help.

Freckled, solid and hungry for life, younger sister Stella idolises Katja: the film, like *Frozen*, is an unabashed love story about the sisterly bond – and its dangers. Stella, played by first-time screen actor Rebecka Josephson, is a creation worthy of comparison to the intense sororal characters in films by Céline Sciamma and Catherine Breillat, clear influences on this first feature from Swedish director Sanna Lenken. Meanwhile the opening shot, a close-up in which a beetle walks over Stella's skin as she recites a poem in voiceover, suggests the work of Janet Frame: the film is full of references to feminist antecedents. But Stella's individual interests are submerged into an intense desire to *be* Katja, leading her into dangerous waters – first when she takes Katja's advice to shave her (invisible) moustache, and later through her passionate feelings for Katja's coach Jacob.

But, as in *Frozen*, the younger sister is also a figure of resolute good sense; in contrast to the gothic direction that a film by Sciamma or Breillat might take, here the Swedish social contract – with its equal parenting, school guidance counsellors and special units for eating disorders – offers an unmelodramatic resolution. Whereas in the films of Susanne Bier, for example, the personal and political are entwined, Lenken only gestures at issues around working motherhood, the effects of the media on body image and paedophilia, .

Despite some striking cinematic strategies – particularly the use of disorientating 360-degree pans when Stella and Katja are training on the ice, or their unusually large vocal range as they whine, whisper, cry, laugh and rage at each other – the film doesn't quite maintain its intensity. While the decision to make Stella the film's point-of-view character has definite benefits, predominantly deriving from Josephson's utterly committed performance, it renders Katja opaque. The hints at larger social contexts in which eating disorders occur are submerged in the mystificatory strategy of regarding Katja from the outside, giving us no access to her perceptions or motivations. "They just don't understand," Katja says of the hospital in the final scene; neither do we.

Amy Deasismont, Rebecka Josephson

There are few fiction features that examine eating disorders, and fewer still that do so in a robust, anti-melodramatic and non-tragic manner, showing the impact both on the sufferer and the family. *My Skinny Sister* is both valuable and striking for making that intervention, but its refusal to explore fully the more complex, intense routes it initially suggests leaves it feeling a little unresolved and somewhat televisual. The Swedish title – *Min lilla syster* – is more ambiguous about the point of view, the 'little' here meaning both younger and physically smaller, or skinny. Had the film committed to moving between Stella's and Katja's perspectives, questioning fully that double meaning, it might have underlined the case it sketches for the damaging way in which girl-training is handed on from generation to generation – and how sisterly love offers the only solution.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Annika Rogell **Written by** Sanna Lenken **Director of Photography** Moritz Schultheiss **Editor** Hanna Lejonqvist **Production Designer** Ellen Oseng **Music** Per Storby Jutbring **Sound Design** Kai Storck **Costume Designer** Mimmi Harms Oredsson

©Tangy AB, Fortune Cookie Film, Film i Väst, SVT & ZDF **Production Companies** Tangy presents in co-production with Fortune Cookie Film, Film i Väst, Sveriges Television & ZDF – Das kleine fernsehspiel in association with Arte with the support of Svenska Filminstitutet, Filmfond Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein, Nordisk Film & TV Fond a film by Sanna Lenken Film produced by Tangy In association with STORY With support from Svenska Filminstitutet, Filmfond Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, the MEDIA program of the European Union & Sandrews Stipendium **Executive Producers** Mimmi Spång Rebecka Lafrenz Tobias Janson

Cast
Rebecka Josephson Stella
Amy Deasismont Katja
Annika Hallin Karin
Henrik Norlen Lasse
Maxim Mehmet Jacob
Ellen Lindbom Iga

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Part-subtitled

Distributor Matchbox Films

Swedish theatrical title **Min lilla syster**

Sweden, the present. Stella, a pre-teen, idolises her older sister Katja, a competitive figure skater, and has a crush on Katja's coach Jacob, which she expresses through poems in her diary. She and Katja are close, but when Stella sees Katja forcing herself to vomit after her birthday dinner, she says she'll tell their parents; Katja retaliates by threatening to reveal Stella's crush. Stella lies for Katja when Jacob is concerned about her weakness, but seeks help from the school counsellor, and eventually reveals Katja's condition to their parents. A peaceful weekend at the family cabin, where Katja initially appears able to eat and engage, is an illusion: Katja starves herself and runs away, causing Stella to seek out Jacob and reveal her crush. She finds Katja collapsed at the ice rink, and later visits her in the hospital unit where she is receiving treatment.

Palio

United Kingdom/Italy 2014
Director: Cosima Spender
Certificate 12A 91m 25s

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Cosima Spender's *Palio* is a vivid and very full-blooded affair, a documentary that captures the *Ben Hur*-like spectacle of the bareback horse race around Siena's medieval square, as well as the wild passions it provokes in owners, jockeys and spectators alike.

To outsiders, aspects of the race can't help but feel thoroughly bizarre. In scenes here that could have come straight out of a surrealistic Luis Buñuel satire on the Catholic Church, we see horses that are about to compete in the Palio being led up to the altar and blessed by priests, as crowds swarm around them. Riderless horses, we learn, are allowed to win the race, and the police give the jockeys dried ox penises with which to whip each other. Spender relishes the ritualistic aspects of a race that has been run since medieval times. She seems fascinated by the jockeys' conspiratorial ways and their colourful, harlequin-like costumes. Each is representing one of the city's many fiercely competitive districts.

The races themselves are thunderous affairs. Losing jockeys risk being spat on or even beaten up; what is startling is that they don't seem surprised or upset at the violence that defeat unleashes on them. Early on, we see footage of horses hurtling into a wall when they take a corner too tightly, but animal cruelty is not an issue addressed here. Spender's approach to her subject is one of fascinated – and at times bewildered – awe. She sets out to capture the grandeur of the event almost as if making a swords-and-sandals gladiatorial epic or a pastiche Sergio Leone western, using all the rhetoric of fictional features: slow motion, rousing music, close-ups of horses' hooves pounding the dust, high-angle shots of vast crowds.

The documentary is structured in conventional fashion. There are two main protagonists, one the wily veteran and the other the fresh-faced newcomer, out to usurp him. Dramatic tension hinges on whether 'king of the square' Gigi Bruschelli will break the longstanding record for Palios won, or whether Giovanni Atzeni, the young pretender, will finally prove that he has the 'big balls' to win the race. Both men are aware that they are playing preordained roles in what is a sporting equivalent of a glorified Punch and Judy show or a piece of Commedia dell'arte; away from the square, both are level-headed and quite charming. The old-timers who grumble that today's jockeys aren't as good as the previous generation are speaking at least partly tongue in cheek.

On one level, the Palio is a lottery. The jockeys don't get to choose their own horses or where they line up at the start of the race, and a flair for a little judicious bribery or intimidation is therefore regarded as every bit as important for riders as their skill on horseback. Cheating is only frowned on when it doesn't work. "A losing jockey must be considered corrupt," one character observes, summing up in a nutshell the distorted values behind the race. The Machiavellian owners and district 'captains' are as desperate as the jockeys to save face; after a defeat, everyone will blame everyone else.

Horses are injured and sometimes killed during the Palio. The circuit they race round is narrow and cramped, and if a jockey takes the wrong line, he stands a good chance of being crushed against a wall. Like bullfighting, the Palio demands a certain suspension of disbelief on behalf of its spectators and participants: if they considered carefully what they were involved in, they would realise that the race is cruel and barbaric. Then again, the Palio dates back more than 800 years and is so deeply engrained in the local culture that to question it would be considered almost heretical.

Spender's film is not a critique of the Palio, nor is it a sociological or historical analysis of why this event has assumed such importance for the city of Siena. It is a celebration. Whatever it may lack in terms of contextualising material, the film is very successful in capturing the Palio's bloodcurdling intensity and flamboyance.

Amazing race: *Palio*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
John Hunt
James Gay-Rees
Written by
Cosima Spender
John Hunt
Cinematography
Stuart Bentley
Edited by
Valerio Bonelli
Music
Alex Heffes
Sound
Giancarlo Dellapina

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Production Companies
Archimedia presents a film by Cosima Spender
An Archimedia production
In association with On the Corner Films
Co-produced by MeMo Films
Executive Producer
Francesco Melzi d'Eril

In Colour [2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Altitude Film Distribution
Picturehouse Entertainment

A documentary looking at what is reputed to be the oldest horse race in the world, the Palio, held twice a year in the Italian city of Siena. The jockeys ride bareback around the city's Piazza del Campo in front of a huge crowd. The race is fiercely competitive, and there is intense rivalry between jockeys, owners and city districts.

Pan

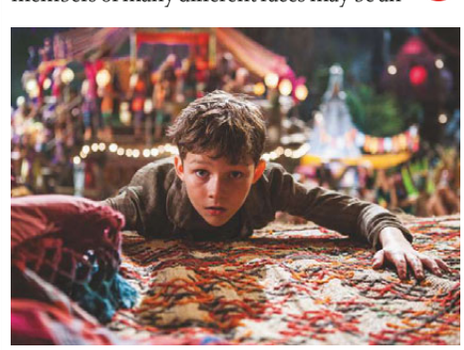
USA 2015
Director: Joe Wright
Certificate PG 111m 21s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

From *Pride & Prejudice* (2005) to *Anna Karenina* (2012), British director Joe Wright has a strong reputation for adaptations of literary classics. "Based on characters introduced by J.M. Barrie", Jason Fuchs's *Pan* script is more of an origin story than an adaptation, about an adolescent Peter, snatched from a WWII orphanage by pirates, enslaved by Blackbeard in Neverland, aided by future enemy Hook and charmed by tribal princess Tiger Lily. It's the latter who informs Peter that he can save the fairies of Neverland from the evil Blackbeard, giving the story a 'chosen one' theme as seen in everything from *The Matrix* to *Harry Potter*.

Aimed squarely at the latter market, Pan gets off to an enjoyable start, as mischievous but deeply lonely Peter (promising newcomer Levi Miller) delights in winding up the odious orphanage overseer Mother Barnabas (an amusing Kathy Burke) and experiences a whirlwind escape – of sorts – when he's taken by pirates swooping down from a flying ship to pluck boys out of their beds. There's a balletic, graceful choreography to this, and to several subsequent scenes, that's typical of Wright and his accomplished collaborators (here he reteams with *Atonement* and *Karenina* DP Seamus McGarvey). The world of Neverland is another visual triumph: Blackbeard's opulent lair is a camp, gothic delight, while Tiger Lily's peaceful tribal dwellings sparkle with the bright, naive colours of Mexican and Peruvian folk art, giving them an otherworldly feel. The costumes by Jacqueline Durran – another of Wright's regular collaborators – complement Aline Bonetto's production design, while visual effects, from fairies to flying ships, are impressive.

But it's while in Neverland that both narrative and character interest begin to falter. The nature of Peter's mission is muddled, and what was a Boy's Own adventure becomes a story cluttered with adult performers of strikingly different tones. While Adeel Akhtar's Smee grovels like a cowardly sitcom character, Hugh Jackman's Blackbeard goes for panto villain; playing Hook, Garrett Hedlund delivers a mannered turn as a loveable rogue of the Indiana Jones mould. Rooney Mara is more restrained as Tiger Lily, but the Caucasian actress is distractingly miscast given that Barrie originally wrote the character as a Native American. Even if you accept that Neverland is a construct of Peter's imagination, Mara appears oddly pale and delicate for a seasoned tribal leader in an apparently tropical climate. Surrounding her with tribe members of many different races may be an



Flyboy: Levi Miller

attempt to obscure this, but it only serves to highlight the haphazard casting approach.

Neverland has its pleasures, not least a scene in which Blackbeard leads a rendition of Nirvana's 'Smells Like Teen Spirit', bursting with rebellious comic vigour. But *Pan* remains most dramatically affecting in the very place that Peter wants to avoid: the gloomy, grey orphanage, where characters and emotions are efficiently portrayed and where there's less to distract from the story's emotional core: the tale of a boy who simply wants his mother.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Greg Berlanti
Sarah Schechter
Paul Webster
Written by
Jason Fuchs
Based on characters introduced by J.M. Barrie
Directors of Photography
Seamus McGarvey
John Mathieson
Edited by
Paul Tothill
William Hoy
Production Designer
Aline Bonetto
Music by/Score Produced by
John Powell
Production Sound Mixer
John Casali
Costume Designer
Jacqueline Durran
Visual Effects
Scanline
FrameStore
MPC
Rising Sun Pictures
Wolf & Crow
The Magic Camera Company Ltd
Filament Post Production
Stunt Co-ordinator
Eunice Huthart

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Production Companies
A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment
A Berlanti production
A Joe Wright film
Executive Producers
Tim Lewis
Steven Mnuchin

Cast
Hugh Jackman
Blackbeard
Garrett Hedlund
James Hook
Rooney Mara
Tiger Lily
Levi Miller
Peter
Adeel Akhtar
Sam Smiegel, 'Smee'
Kathy Burke
Mother Barnabus
Nonso Anozie
Bishop
Amanda Seyfried
Mary
Jack Charles
chief
Lewis MacDougall
Nibs
Bronson Webb
Steps
Taejoo Na
Kwahu
Cara Delevingne
mermaids

Dolby Atmos Colour and Prints by
Technicolor
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

London, World War II. Baby Peter is dropped at the Lambeth Home for Boys, where he grows up hoping that his mother will come back for him. He makes an enemy of Mother Barnabas, who oversees the orphanage.

When he is 12, Peter is kidnapped by pirates in a flying ship and taken to Neverland, where he is forced to mine for 'pixum' – rejuvenating fairy dust. When ruthless pirate leader Blackbeard – who is addicted to pixum – demands that Peter walk the plank from his flying ship, Peter discovers that he can fly. Peter escapes in another flying ship with fellow captive James Hook and Blackbeard's employee Smee. They are captured by Tiger Lily and her tribe but released when the tribespeople spot the tiny panpipe necklace that Peter wears, which was left to him by his mother. Peter learns of the legend of a boy who is half-fairy and half-human, and who will one day return to help the fairies – he may be that boy.

Tiger Lily reveals to Peter the location of a special fairy kingdom (in a cave). Blackbeard tracks down Smee, who tells him where to find Peter and Hook. Smee also tells Blackbeard about the fairy world, which is full of the pixum that Blackbeard craves. Hook and Tiger Lily are captured by Blackbeard and his men; Hook reveals the location of the fairy kingdom in return for Tiger Lily's release. Hook, Peter and Tiger Lily head for the fairy kingdom, where Peter sees a vision of his mother. Blackbeard finds the cave; Hook flees but returns to help Peter outwit him. Blackbeard's ship crashes and he apparently goes down with it. Hook, Peter and Tiger Lily fly off on their pirate ship to new adventures.

Paper Planes

Australia/Republic of Korea 2014
Director: Robert Connolly
Certificate U 96m 43s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

This warm-hearted children's film is an old-fashioned tale about a defiantly old-fashioned pursuit: the making and flying of paper aeroplanes. That it's framed around a competition is mainly for the sake of dramatic tension; unlike other tournament films such as 2014's maths-prodigy fable *X+Y*, this is far from being a study of obsessive perfectionism or preternatural genius: folding a piece of A4 into a shape that will glide across the room is something everyone has done as a kid, and the film makes no bones about the element of luck involved in our young hero's not-very-nailbiting progress from school contest to world championships. Instead, it is the poetic and symbolic potential of these delicate feats of engineering – digitally rendered so that we can follow their looping, erratic transit – that interests writer-director Robert Connolly.

At 12 years old, Dylan (Ed Oxenbould) is on the cusp of taking flight himself, and the screenplay (co-written by Steve Worland) carefully charts his bumpy coming-of-age journey as he struggles to parent a father (Sam Worthington) who is lost in a wilderness of grief after the death of Dylan's mother. With dad slumped on the sofa in their cramped and chaotic shack in rural Australia, Dylan is left to negotiate the turbulence in his life more or less by himself. But never fear: his sense of fair play, his tenacity and his good-heartedness soon win him new friends who help him on his way to international glory.

Plotwise, there isn't much here that will startle the adults in the audience, though the target pre-teen market will lap up Dylan's triumph over adversity, which is well judged to avoid any egregiously vomit-inducing platitudes. Instead, Connolly wisely leans on Oxenbould's considerable charm and intelligent comic timing, along with a scene-stealing turn from Terry Norris as Dylan's grandpa. The old rascal is an ex-pilot, and his way with the ladies seems to have rubbed off on his grandson along with his interest in

Flight club: Ed Oxenbould, Julian Dennison

flight, judging from the way Dylan steals the heart of Kimi (Ena Imai), the Japanese origami expert who is a fellow finalist at the big championship in Tokyo. Their burgeoning friendship enrages the smug and entitled rich kid Jason (Nicholas Bakopoulos-Cooke) who is Dylan's rival and arch-enemy, and whose eye has also been caught by cute Kimi. Naturally, Jason's mean-spirited belief that winning is all that matters is set up as the prime fallacy that must be defeated by Dylan's better nature. It's a message that is somewhat diluted by the fact that it is, after all, his success at flying paper aeroplanes that brings Dylan his happy ending; the film's climax suggests a loss of nerve in this respect, and would have been stronger if it had stuck to its own core message.

Still, there is plenty here to take home about the value of beauty and originality in a world that often seems to prioritise ruthless competitiveness. In a film about communication and its obstacles and lapses, Dylan's paper planes become a means of transmission, carrying precious elements of himself across the wide blue yonder into adulthood. Paper planes finally come to stand for all those small and graceful gestures that bind people to the ones they care about.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Robert Connolly
Maggie Miles
Liz Kearney
Screenplay
Robert Connolly
Steve Worland
Inspired by Dylan Parker, James Norton
Cinematographer
Tristan Milani
Film Editor
Nick Meyers
Production Designer
Clayton Jauncey
Original Music
Nigel Westlake
Sound Designer
Chris Goodes
Costume Designer
Lien See Leong

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Production Companies
Screen Australia presents in association with ScreenWest and LotteryWest, Australian Children's Television Foundation, Melbourne International Film Festival Premiere Fund and EMIG
an Arenamedia production
Developed and post produced in Melbourne Australia with the assistance of Film Victoria
Produced with the assistance of EMIG, DDP, Soundfirm
Produced with the financial assistance of the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) Premiere Fund
Produced with the assistance of ScreenWest and LotteryWest
Principal development and production investor: Screen Australia
Executive Producers
Andrew Myer
Jonathan Chissick
Gary Hamilton
Ying Ye
Bernadette O'Mahony
Eric Bana
Film Extracts
Love the Beast (2009)

Cast
Sam Worthington
Jack, Dylan's dad
Ed Oxenbould
Dylan
Deborah Mailman
Maureen
Nicholas Bakopoulos-Cooke
Jason
Ena Imai
Kimi
Terry Norris
grandpa
Peter Rowsthorn
Mr Hickenlooper
Julian Dennison
Kevin
David Wenham
Patrick

Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Australia, present day. Twelve-year-old Dylan is an outsider at school because his father Jack is out of work and can't afford to buy him the kind of smartphone that all his classmates are obsessed with. Jack has been depressed since Dylan's mother died in a car accident five months ago. When Dylan wins the school's paper-plane-throwing contest, new horizons open up for him and he sets his sights first on the regional heats in Sydney and then the world championships in Tokyo. With the encouragement of his grandfather, the advice of a pretty Japanese origami expert who is a fellow competitor and his own careful observations of the natural world, Dylan fashions a plane that is both beautiful and effective, winning the top prize and beating his ruthless and underhand opponent. Dylan's father also begins to reconnect with the world, rousing himself from his grief and reluctantly selling his dead wife's treasured piano in order to buy a ticket to Japan to be with his son.

The Perfect Guy

USA 2015
Director: David M. Rosenthal
Certificate 15 99m 43s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

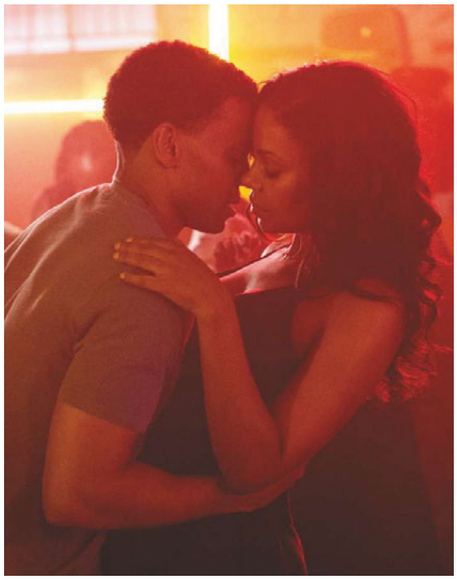
Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The turning point in *The Perfect Guy* comes when lobbyist Leah (Sanaa Lathan) and her boyfriend Carter (Michael Ealy) stop for fuel on their way back from a weekend visit to her parents in San Francisco. While Carter is inside the gas station, a stranger comes up and, admiring Carter's cherry 1968 Dodge Charger, begins to ask Leah a few innocent questions. Suddenly, Carter is on top of the stranger, pummelling him to within an inch of his life, stopping only when the garage attendant pulls a gun on him.

This is as good a time as any to mention that Carter and Leah are black, while the gas station attendant with the gun and the man on the ground are white. The particularities of this dynamic aren't explicitly addressed here, nor is race in any way made an issue at any point in *The Perfect Guy*. This is, of course, the prerogative of director David M. Rosenthal and screenwriter Tyger Williams, whose last screen credit was 1993's classic *Menace II Society* – they are out to make a polished executive-class thriller, not a treatise on being black in America. The problem is that there is little in their psycho-stalker picture that most viewers won't have seen done (and done better) a thousand times before, so it seems a wasted opportunity not to take advantage of one of the few elements distinguishing this interpretation of familiar material. Likewise, one wonders why any movie would have for its heroine a lobbyist – perhaps the most distrusted professional class in the US – and not incorporate this into the narrative in any but the most perfunctory way.

Perfunctory is the word that best describes most of *The Perfect Guy*. When Carter, jilted, snaps and begins to show his true psychopathic colours, the always-winning Ealy – also a producer here – manifests his madness with the most predictable, telegraphed gestures. (I will confess, though, to enjoying the moment when he breaks into Leah's house and solemnly pops her toothbrush into his mouth.) The interstitial mood-setting shots of Los Angeles are strictly bush league: the Hollywood sign and a coyote trotting across a street by night. Even the film's murders aren't gone about with much gusto, though when Carter is finally gunned down by Leah there's a kiss-off one-liner and a little space for audience applause. She has purchased the gun, it should be noted, on the advice of Holt McCallany's police detective, who first advises her on the ins-and-outs of the state of California's 'stand your ground' law, for which the film acts as a rather enthusiastic advertisement. (Perhaps I was wrong to say there's no lobbying in the film.)

The Perfect Guy is not a good movie per se, but it is a functional one. The cinematography by Peter Simonite has a catalogue-photo suavity; the cast, which also includes Morris Chestnut and Charles S. Dutton, is appealing; and the film doesn't overstay its welcome. Such thoroughgoing mediocrity has a certain comfort-food value, and there's something to be said for a movie that occupies the middle range as contently as if it were lounging in a hammock.



Get Carter: Michael Ealy, Sanaa Lathan

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nicole Rocklin
Wendy Rhoads
Darryl Taja
Tommy Oliver
Screenplay
Tyger Williams
Story
Alan McElroy
Tyger Williams
Director of Photography
Peter Simonite
Editor
Joan Sobel
Production Designer
William Arnold
Music
Atli Örvarsson
David Fleming
Production Sound Mixer
Steve Morrow
Costume Designer
Annie Bloom

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Production Companies
Screen Gems presents a Rocklin/Faust production
Executive Producers
Michael Ealy
Sanaa Lathan
Glenn S. Gainor

Cast
Sanaa Lathan
Leah
Michael Ealy
Carter
Morris Chestnut
David, 'Dave'
L. Scott Caldwell
Evelyn
Charles S. Dutton
Roger
John Getz
Renkin
Tess Harper
Mrs McCarthy
Kathryn Morris
Karen
Rutina Wesley
Alicia
Holt McCallany
Detective Hansen
Jessica Parker Kennedy
Rachel
David Starzyk
Frank
Ronnie Gene Blevins
Roy, mechanic
Wilmer Calderon
Detective Gardner
Gordon Clapp
Bill Forsythe

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

Los Angeles, present day. Leah, a lobbyist, breaks up with long-term boyfriend David after he states that he's not ready for marriage. Shortly afterwards, Leah meets Carter, a security systems and IT expert, and they begin dating. Leah takes Carter to meet her parents in San Francisco, and he makes a good impression, but on the drive back he gets into a violent confrontation with a stranger at a gas station. When Leah, traumatised by the incident, breaks off the relationship, Carter begins stalking her; he breaks into her house and takes her cat. Leah notifies the police, and Detective Hansen puts a restraining order on Carter. Leah begins seeing David again. When Carter shows up at a restaurant where they're dining, there is a terse confrontation between the two men. Carter continues his campaign of harassment, emailing a video of David and Leah in bed to her co-workers, murdering a neighbour who finds him in Leah's house, and arranging for David to have a fatal car accident. On the advice of Detective Hansen, Leah buys a shotgun, and after breaking into and vandalising Carter's home, she returns to her house to lie in wait for him. He breaks in, and she kills him after a struggle. She goes to the police station to turn herself in.

Premature

USA/United Kingdom 2013
Director: Dan Beers
Certificate 15 93m 44s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

A teen-oriented mixture of *Groundhog Day* (1993) and the video for Lonely Island's 'Jizz in My Pants' (more than 51 millions views since 2009), *Premature* is not for the faint of heart. It begins with suburban schoolboy Rob (John Karna) being woken up by his mother on the day of his interview for Georgetown University, having had a wet dream. The interview goes well, and later he winds up almost losing his virginity to sexually experienced fellow student Angela (Carlson Young), but at the critical moment the day resets, again with his mother walking in on him. (Rob sleeps *sans* duvet, so as not to leave her or us in any doubt as to what's happened.)

The same thing recurs every time he ejaculates – on one occasion he manually stimulates himself in public to ward off a gang of bullies – until he realises that he should really lose his virginity to his nice, intelligent, attractive friend Gabrielle (Katie Findlay) rather than Angela, who is nice enough, and glossy, but damnably promiscuous and not Georgetown material. (Both are played by twentysomethings.) Along the way he grabs a teacher's breasts, punches a girl in the face and encounters some crazed Iranians out of a 19th-century sensation fiction. But the only lesson he has to learn – a priggish, self-centred travesty of morality by comparison with *Groundhog Day* – is to have sex with 'Gab', not Angela, while his father and the Georgetown interviewer almost literally cheer him on.

Come again: John Karna

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Aaron Ryder
Karen Lunder
Written by
Dan Beers
Mathew Harawitz
Director of Photography
Jimmy Lindsey
Editor
Robert Nassau
Production Designer
John Paino
Music
Nick Urata
Sound Mixer
Drew Ponder
Costume Designer
Amela Baksic

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Production Companies
FilmNation Entertainment presents in association with AI Film a FilmNation Entertainment production
Executive Producers
Aviv Giladi
Len Blavatnik
Glen Basner
Vince Holden

Cast
John Karna
Rob Crabbe
Craig Roberts
Stanley
Katie Findlay
Gabrielle
Alan Tudyk
Jack Roth
Adam Riegler
Arthur
Carlson Young
Angela Yearwood
Elon Gold
Mr Hughes

Dolby Digital
Colour by
Harbor Picture Company

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

US, present day. On the day of his university entrance interview, schoolboy Rob becomes trapped in a time loop, restarting the day every time he ejaculates, usually when he tries to have sex with fellow student Angela. After handling the day's events in different ways, he eventually breaks the cycle by losing his virginity to his good friend Gabrielle.

Radiator

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Tom Browne

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The exhortation to "rage against the dying of the light" may be a romantic one, but it is well known to those who care for aged family members that the rage which accompanies the end of life is often visited on the sufferer's nearest and dearest. Tom Browne's small-scale but insightful feature examines this punishing scenario via skilfully observed exchanges between a raw-tempered elderly invalid Leonard (Richard Johnson), his put-upon but indefatigable wife Maria (Gemma Jones) and their warm-hearted but standoffish son Daniel (Daniel Cerqueira).

Made without frills, the film combines its low-key presentation with sustained perceptiveness. The fact that neither intimacy nor affection is a given between adult children and elderly parents is neatly captured in the detail that Daniel calls both Maria and Leonard by their first names, and the viewer is not made aware of the relationship between the three until some way into the narrative. Even once we grasp that he is the couple's son, it's not made clear quite what's gone wrong between them all, or if Leonard has just made it impossible for anyone to be happy in his company.

Johnson plays Leonard as a clever but humourless bully whose advancing physical weakness coexists incongruously with the icy self-possession with which he still attempts to lay down the law. His hypocrisy is at once darkly funny and painful to watch. Surrounded by heaps of mouldering belongings that he refuses to throw away, he subjects Maria to a high-handed harangue for getting mud on her trousers, telling her, "I am exhausted by this constant battle to rein in your slovenliness... Are you weeping?" Small indicators of this curmudgeon's long-masked vulnerability – an abortive and rebuffed attempt to hug his son, a private fit of tears – are powerfully affecting. Jones's Maria evokes a complicated and completely convincing response to perpetual strain and criticism: her bustling practicality comes across as neither martyrdom nor a domestic form of Stockholm syndrome, but simply a necessary adaptation to her lot in life.

Cliché is also avoided in the characterisation of Daniel, who's neither an obviously damaged tearaway nor a London sophisticate impatient with rural bumpkinry, but a nice, under-confident loner whose sweetness and sensitivity slowly

Warming up: Gemma Jones, Richard Johnson

come to radiate out from Cerqueira's offbeat performance. Daniel's work teaching children to read, which it's hinted may also have been Maria's line prior to retirement, serves to emphasise the cycle of life – how much we need others at either end of it – and also the simple power of words to explain, entertain, entrap and injure. Leonard deploys his articulacy to wound, and has no adeptness at 'reading' others; for that he relies on Maria, who seems to deserve better but maintains that she was attracted to Leonard because "he was unlike anybody else".

Daniel's fascination and frustration with their bond expresses the impenetrable mystique of one's parents' past relationship, and also the paradox of feeling that they might have been better off without each other while knowing that this would negate one's own existence. Subtle, telling scenes abound, with information relayed to the viewer in ways that are imaginatively indirect without being wilfully obscure. A scene in which Daniel explains his family situation in halting French to a woman who's either a date or a language tutor, before unexpectedly dissolving into tears, is masterful in its ambiguity and tender awkwardness, and elegantly gathers together the film's understated but universal themes: the challenges of self-expression and of closeness; the fear of losing emotional and physical control; the complexities that lie behind apparently straightforward human relationships. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Genevieve Stevens
Original Screenplay
Tom Browne
Daniel Cerqueira
Director of Photography
David Johnson
Editor
Joe Randall-Cutler
Production Designer
Sarah Kane
Composer
Simon Allen
Sound Recordist
Brando Mosca
Costume Designer
Lorraine Sibanda

©Turnchapel Films

Production Companies
Turnchapel Films in association with Rattling Stick
Co-producer: xFilm
Executive Producers
Mel Agace
Tom Browne
Rachel Weisz
Barbara Broccoli
Michael Wilson
Ian Paley
Emily Dyson Paley
at Rattling Stick:
Daniel Kleinman
Johnnie Frankel
Ringan Ledwidge

Cast
Daniel Cerqueira
Daniel
Richard Johnson
Leonard
Gemma Jones
Maria

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Picturehouse Entertainment

The Lake District, the present. Middle-aged Daniel is summoned by his mother Maria to his parents' home, where his elderly and infirm father Leonard is refusing to move from the couch. Daniel finds Leonard sitting in his own filth, the house in disorder around him and the meek Maria attempting to proceed as if all is well. Daniel arranges for a nurse to visit and a hospital bed to be installed. When Maria agrees, at Daniel's urging, to attend a friend's retirement party, Daniel and Leonard are left alone for a few days. Leonard's awkwardness and irascibility try Daniel's patience. Maria comes home to a bad atmosphere. Daniel flees briefly back to London and to his work, but soon returns to the Lake District, where Maria is trying to persuade Leonard to sign the paperwork for his will. He does so, but it is Maria who suddenly dies. Having arranged care for Leonard, Daniel returns to London again.

Regression

Spain/Canada/USA/France 2015
Director: Alejandro Amenábar
Certificate 15 106m 4s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Films trafficking in religion and evil must eventually decide where they stand on their own satanic mechanics. For example, Scott Derrickson's *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (2005), which was adapted very loosely from the true story of a young German woman named Anneliese Michel, flirted at first with rationalism and reality but in the end fully embraced demonism. By contrast, Hans-Christian Schmid's *Requiem* (2006) was based on the same story but attributed its protagonist's horrific death to her own illness and an overzealous Church rather than to any supernatural power. Schmid's film accorded with the conclusions of a commission by the German Bishops' Conference, but it was Derrickson's 'imaginative' retelling of the story that was to have greater box-office appeal. After all, blind leaps of faith neatly mirror the sort of suspended disbelief required by the genre, and, famously, the devil always gets the best tunes.

This is what makes *Regression*, the latest film from Alejandro Amenábar (*Thesis*, *Open Your Eyes*, *The Others*, *The Sea Inside*, *Agora*) rather audacious. For though it certainly plays in the main(stream) as a supernatural thriller in which police detective Bruce Kenner (Ethan Hawke) joins forces with psychiatrist Professor Kenneth Raines (David Thewlis) to investigate the satanic ritual abuse of a teenage Angela Gray (Emma Watson), it never forgets the 'real events' (80s/early 90s Satanic panic) by which it claims in opening text to have been inspired, and so propels its agnostic protagonist (our double) along parallel paths of superstitious pandemonium and more grounded actuality, all in a perpetually raining Minnesotan *noir*-town (fictional Hoyer, though the film was in fact shot in Ontario).

Here the foremost tool in Amenábar's filmmaking work-shed is the frequent use of POV shots to mark what we are seeing as restricted to an individual's perception. First there is the blurry perspective of Angela's father John (David Dencik) as he enters Hoyer's police station and admits to his daughter's accusations of sexual abuse, despite claiming not to remember these events. This perspective then shifts to various members of Angela's family as, under the influence of Kenneth's regression hypnotherapy, they (and we with them) experience distorted visions of hooded cabals. Eventually, *Regression* will share its perspective with Bruce himself, as he listens obsessively to recordings of all these testimonies, starts picturing devilish crime scenes in empty buildings and dreams vividly of cultish incursions. Bruce is one of those 'intuitive' detectives so beloved of genre cinema – the

Satanic panic: Emma Watson

dogged maverick who pursues his hunches to the end – yet through him Amenábar illustrates how easily a narrative's gaps can be filled with prejudice and fancy, allowing us to see only what, deep down, we want to see – and believe.

So *Regression* seduces with sensationalist fantasy, before delivering a less palatable, more banal truth that may well, as Derrickson understood, prove the harder sell. For Amenábar has crafted a peculiar meta-thriller in which storytelling, complicit credulity and even image-making itself occupy a Gray area. And, by ultimately allowing reason to triumph over both religious hysteria and crackpot pseudo-science, he has also placed a line in the sand of America's culture wars. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Fernando Bovaira
Producers Alejandro Amenábar, Christina Piovesan
Written by Alejandro Amenábar
Director of Photography Daniel Aranyó
Editor Carolina Martínez, Geoff Ashenhurst
Production Designer Carol Spier
Music Roque Baños
Sound Designer Gabriel Gutiérrez
Costume Designer Sonia Grande

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Production Companies The Weinstein Company presents a MOD Entertainment, MOD Producciones, Himenóptero, First Generation Films, Telefonica Studios and Regression A.I.E. production in association with FilmNation Entertainment with the participation of Telefilm Canada, Canal+ with the collaboration of Mediaset España with the support of I.C.A.A.
Executive Producers Simón de Santiago, Alex Lalonde, Bob Weinstein, Harvey Weinstein, Ghislain Barrois, Axel Kuschevatzky, Noah Segal

Cast
Ethan Hawke Detective Bruce Kenner
Emma Watson Angela Gray
David Thewlis Kenneth Raines
Lothaire Bluteau Reverend Beaumont
Dale Dickey Rose Gray
David Dencik John Gray
Peter MacNeill Police Chief Cleveland
Devon Bostick Roy Gray
Aaron Ashmore George Nesbitt

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

Hoyer, Minnesota, 1990. Confronted with written accusations that he sexually abused his daughter Angela, born-again ex-alcoholic widower John Gray confesses, though he claims to have no memory of the events. Under psychiatrist Kenneth Raines's regression hypnotherapy, however, John recalls photographing someone else abusing Angela. Angela, who has sought refuge with Reverend Beaumont, tells Detective Bruce Kenner of group abuse over the past two years, and of satanic rituals and human sacrifice in her father's work-shed. Identified as an abuser, Bruce's police partner George is arrested. Bruce and Kenneth fly to Pittsburgh to interview Angela's estranged brother Roy. He denies Angela's story, but under hypnosis recalls hooded figures in makeup. Bruce listens to these recorded testimonies over and over again, and immerses himself in occult literature. Warned by Angela of the dangers posed by the satanic clan, Bruce has the Gray property searched for bodies. Meanwhile, he receives mysterious silent phone calls, and is himself visited in his sleep by hooded figures. Arriving home one night, he is attacked by a hooded George, who has been released for want of evidence and is out for revenge. George reveals that Angela, his one-time lover, has always hated her family. Bruce realises that she has invented her accusations; her stories have been aided by a climate of 'Satan panic', a complicit Church and Kenneth's bogus hypnotherapy. John, racked with guilt over his dead wife, decides to serve time for acts of abuse he never committed, hoping that this will reconcile him with Angela.

Revenge of The Mekons

USA 2013
Director: Joe Angio

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Writing last year in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* about Wussy's album *Attica!*, the sometimes film critic Charles Taylor identified the particular experience that the Cincinnati-based band speaks to. "Blue-collar bohemianism is what you call it," he writes, "if you're entering middle age and find, without planning it, that you haven't relegated your interests and passions to hobbies, that those passions are still how you define yourself, that you're working at a job – and likely more than one – to pay the rent and provide a modicum of stability rather than carving out a career."

The milieu Taylor describes is rather similar to that explored in *Revenge of The Mekons*, a 2013 documentary profiling the strange trajectory of a group who began as a stridently leftist quintet at the University of Leeds in 1977 and have continued to reinvent themselves through subsequent years by infusions of fresh talent – the only original and constant members of the currently eight-piece band are Jon Langford and Tom Greenhalgh – and engagement with new idioms, from American country-and-western music to performance and gallery art.

Director Joe Angio, whose previous credits include a 2005 portrait of filmmaker Melvin Van Peebles, *How to Eat Your Watermelon in White Company (and Enjoy It)*, would seem to have a genuine affinity for subjects who shun traditional career paths to hack through the underbrush on their lonesome. Angio's original material spans several years in the life of the band, from a 2007 '30th anniversary' UK tour plagued by middling crowds and venue cancellations to the conception, recording and mixing of the 2011 album *Ancient and Modern*. As the members of the 'bi-continental' Mekons are scattered across the Anglosphere, the ergonomics of such an undertaking are rather tricky, something Angio neatly addresses by following the development of a single song, from cribbing Edna O'Brien dialogue at a farmhouse in Devon, through individual recording sessions in Chicago and Los Angeles, to a final mix-down in London.

There's no dearth of rock docs on the market, but Angio's contribution is distinguished by its attention to the practical exigencies of keeping a creative collective functioning over the span of four decades without ever once being seriously disturbed by the threat of success – the band's head-against-a-brick-wall failure to establish itself as anything but a break-even financial proposition is discussed, while Ed Roche of Touch and Go Records, the Mekons' label, reveals the grim figures of the critical darlings' record sales. At no point does Angio gloss over the necessity of paying the rent – bassist Sarah Corina speaks of getting by on freelancing "bits and bobs", and other members refer to their regular gigs, some of which are more exciting than others. Multi-instrumentalist 'Lu' Edmonds is followed on one of his periodic trips to Central Asia, where he studies indigenous music and helps to set up a recording studio in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, while violinist Susie Honeyman discusses her work in the Grey Gallery, which she co-founded, part of its mandate being to reject what she perceives as an overemphasis on the young and 'emerging' artist.

This unusual focus on offstage workaday

Shifting sands: The Mekons

life, and the manner in which it in turn feeds into the band's music, makes *Revenge of The Mekons* something more than a fan's mash note, a sporadically touching hat-tip to the endurance of the blue-collar bohemian passing through middle age with a sprightly trudge. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Joe Angio
Cinematography Joe Angio, Jean-Louis Schuller
Edited by Jane Rizzo
Supervising Sound Mixer Matt Rocker

©Roseland Mekonista Productions LLC
Production Companies Roseland Films presents Semaphore Media and Daniel 13 Productions A film by Joe Angio Support for this film provided by IFP/New York Produced by Roseland Films & Media
Executive Producers Jim Hardison, Jefferson Holt, Marcus Widenor

In Colour

Distributor MusicFilmNetwork

A documentary about the British band The Mekons.

In 1977, at the University of Leeds, fired by the example of the touring Sex Pistols, five students who can hardly play an instrument between them form a band, The Mekons. The film charts the group's unlikely decades-spanning career, from the recording of their first single 'Never Been in a Riot' to their reinvention as a live act in the wake of the 1984 miners' strikes, their discovery of American country-and-western music and, finally, their contemporary existence as a multinational collective whose members are scattered across the US and the UK.

We see the band on the road in the UK for a 30th anniversary tour, and witness them writing and recording material for their 2011 album 'Ancient and Modern'. We hear testimony from Mekons past and present, including founding members Jon Langford and Tom Greenhalgh and singer Sally Timms. There are also interviews with, among others, artist Vito Acconci, rock critic Greil Marcus, writers Jonathan Franzen and Luc Sante, musicians Will Oldham and Fred Armisen, and filmmaker Mary Harron, who reads an early review of the band that she penned for 'Melody Maker'.

Solace

USA/Australia/Switzerland 2014
Director: Afonso Poyart
Certificate 15 101m 17s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The investigator protagonist and serial-killer antagonist of *Solace* share the gift of clairvoyance, but the film itself is backwards-looking. While the central relationship of a young FBI agent, played by Abbie Cornish, and a psychic, played by Anthony Hopkins, is clearly meant to echo *The Silence of the Lambs* (1990), that film's frisson is missing, and all that is achieved is a rerun of the sexual politics of a quarter of a century ago. In one among many procedurally and humanly unconvincing scenes, Hopkins's character psychically perceives that a man suspected of killing his wife is secretly gay: "*How the fuck did you know that?*" the man asks, as if Hopkins had guessed his birthday.

Hopkins's premonitions, including some tastelessly aestheticised images of suicide, are rendered in the manner of a turn-of-the-1990s rock video; one recurring image, of a teenage girl giving a come-hither look down the lens, turns out to be his main memory of his dead daughter. There is a germ of a premise – the killer targets the terminally ill, to spare them the pain only he can foresee – but structure, direction, dialogue, above all intelligence, are wanting.

Terminal man: Colin Farrell

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Beau Flynn
Thomas Augsberger
Tripp Vinson
Matthias Emcke
Claudia Bluemhuber
Written by
Sean Bailey
Ted Griffin
Director of Photography
Brendan Galvin
Editor
Lucas Gonzaga
Production Designer
Brad Ricker
Music
BT
Production Sound Mixer
Shirley Libby
Costume Designer
Denise Wingate

©Supersensory, LLC

Production Companies
Silver Reel in association with Venture Forth and FilmNation Entertainment present a FPC and Eden Rock Media production
Executive Producers
Sean Bailey
Jacob Pechenik
Gerd Scheppers
Anthony Hopkins

Cast
Anthony Hopkins
Dr John Clancy
Jeffrey Dean Morgan
Joe Merriwether
Abbie Cornish
Agent Katherine Cowles
Colin Farrell
the stranger/ Charles Ambrose
Matt Gerald
Agent Sloman
Jose Pablo Cantillo
Agent Sawyer
Marley Shelton
Laura Merriwether
Xander Berkeley
Mr Ellis
Sharon Lawrence
Mrs Ellis
Janine Turner
Elizabeth Clancy

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

US, present day. John Clancy, a psychic investigator who retired following his daughter's death from leukaemia, is persuaded by FBI agents to help them apprehend a serial killer. It transpires that the killer is also a psychic, and is targeting the terminally ill, using the justification that he is sparing them from future pain. The killer engineers a situation in which he pits his psychic powers against Clancy's; while he accurately foresees his own death at Clancy's hands, he fails to perceive that Clancy had in fact helped his own suffering daughter to die.

Star Men

Canada/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Alison Rose
Certificate PG 87m 59s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Whether it's Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger opening *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) with a cheery "This is the universe – big, isn't it?" or Pressburger's compatriot Béla Tarr constructing a working model of the solar system with the aid of a pubful of sozzled Hungarian peasants at the start of *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), there has always been something disarmingly winning about fusions of the cosmic and the cosy, the latter seemingly an essential part of humanising the former.

Thankfully, this is very much director Alison Rose's strategy. Although her documentary deals directly with some of the biggest ideas that anyone has had since Darwin penned *On the Origin of Species*, it's largely told from the perspective of four septuagenarian British astronomers who come together for a 50th-anniversary reunion-cum-tour of their old American haunts. They originally met as colleagues at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) as part of an early-60s brain drain after it became impossible to ignore that the Sputnik-spooked US was taking outer space much more seriously than dear old Blighty and offered not just hefty salaries to back this up but also regular access to what the men believed were the two best telescopes in the world.

The quartet comprises Donald Lynden-Bell (Emeritus Professor of Astrophysics at Cambridge University), Roger Griffin (Emeritus Professor of Observational Astronomy at Cambridge), Wallace 'Wal' Sargent (Ira S. Bowen Professor of Astrophysics at Caltech) and Nick Woolf (Emeritus Professor of Astronomy at the University of Arizona). Despite their intimidating intellectual achievements (all four have made significant advances in their fields), they prove very engaging company, dressing down even for the formally lit talking-head interviews and lightheartedly joshing each other when together (archive photographs suggest this is a lifelong habit). More aware than most of just how insignificant they are in the wider scheme of things, they clearly believe in enjoying life, though in their case this enjoyment might involve compiling book-length analyses of the spectrum emitted by a single star. Religion also gets a look-in, albeit from a scientifically rationalist perspective – Donald (we're on first-name terms from the start) defends the psychologically calming effect of a weekly visit to church, even though he cheerfully concedes that "the evidence is not very strong, but there we are".

Mortality is a recurring theme. None of the men has any illusions about the implications of their increasingly advanced age (they all grew up during WWII, where the government-enforced ban on light pollution inadvertently created perfect viewing conditions for budding astronomers), and Wal died only a few months after the reunion, something matter-of-factly anticipated by Nick. In fact, the film should have featured a quintet, but John 'Bottle' Hazlehurst was unable to appear for health reasons. In the final act, when Roger and Donald accompany the filmmakers on a repeat of a 1960 hike to Utah's Rainbow Bridge (the world's largest natural land bridge), mid-trek health scares trigger more philosophising about their past and future.

Galaxy quest: *Star Men*

Presented via a mixture of video footage of the reunion trip, archive stills and talking-head interviews, the film falls down only with Ken Myhr's blandly minimalist school-of-Glass score, presumably designed as a musical illustration of Nick's interpretation of astronomy as a method of imposing coherent patterns on our image of the universe, with chuggingly conventional arpeggios and harmonies overlaying images that demand something far more visionary: the stars, the vast landscapes, the towering structures of the telescopes, as beautiful in their own way as the natural canyons and ravines of Colorado and Utah and the brave o'erhanging firmament above them.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Alison Rose
Writer
Alison Rose
Director of Photography
Daniel Grant
Editor
Dave Kazala
Composer
Ken Myhr
Sound Recordist
Peter Sawade

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Production Companies
Inigo Films & VisionTV/ ZoomerMedia presents
Produced in Association with Canal D Canada Media Fund, OMDC Film Fund, The Rogers Documentary Fund, Bungalow Town Productions, Inigo Films

Executive Producers
Moses Znaimer
Richard Hanet
Jez Lewis

narrator
Alison Rose

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Verve Pictures

California, March 2011. British-born astronomers Roger Griffin, Donald Lynden-Bell, Wallace ('Wal') Sargent and Nick Woolf meet for a 50th-anniversary re-enactment of a trip they made to the US as part of the early-1960s brain drain. They reminisce about their careers, discuss how our understanding of the universe has been enhanced over half a century of discoveries and innovations, and philosophise about humanity's insignificance and their own mortality. They revisit various observatories (Mount Wilson, Palomar and Keck in California; the Very Large Array in New Mexico; the Large Binocular Telescope in Arizona), the Grand Canyon and Utah's Rainbow Bridge, to which they hiked in December 1960. Nick and Wal decide not to repeat the hike, but Donald and Roger go ahead. Despite experiencing health problems en route, they reach the bridge and find Nick waiting there for them. They unfurl the same Union Jack that they first draped there 50 years earlier.

Steve Jobs

USA/United Kingdom/Japan 2015
Director: Danny Boyle
Certificate 15 122m 16s

See Feature on page 32

Reviewed by Mark Sinker

"Most people weren't the smartest kid in the class," sniped Josh at Toby in Aaron Sorkin's TV series *The West Wing* a few years back. "Most people didn't like the smartest kid in the class." Sorkin has now scripted two biopics about people who were the 'smartest kid in the class' – the first was *The Social Network* (2010), about Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg – and he's in his element with the second, *Steve Jobs*, writing for an ensemble cast who very effectively dramatise the collision of incompatible species of intelligence. It's extremely entertaining. It's also – as you realise once it's over – quite shallow. Sorkin has always had a tendency to lecture us on his pet political topics: here the smartest person in the room, so boneheaded about interpersonal relationships and credit due, apparently learns not to be such a dick to partners and colleagues and children. Obviously it's not the worst message to be promoting, but it's a feelgood letdown.

It's also very much a consequence of what makes the film so watchable. *The Social Network* was designed around the two simultaneous multimillion-dollar court cases that Zuckerberg found himself involved in, with flashbacks setting out his invention's evolution woven into this. David Fincher directed the material dark, physically and emotionally, with main characters who mostly seemed pretty unpleasant, their flaws an implied infection in the heart of the social media Zuckerberg gifted to the world. By contrast, *Steve Jobs* is fashioned around three major tech launches and, aside from the flashbacks that flesh out the story, everything takes place right there in the backstage rooms of the theatres where these presentations are hosted, in the fraught minutes running up to them. Director Danny Boyle has an expert grasp of the meaning of effective spectacle, but here he wittily cuts away just as Jobs arrives on stage every time – we see only hints and glimpses of the triumphant performances themselves.

This is a masterclass in neatness of structure, as formally perfect as a 1950s play. In each of the three acts, Jobs argues with the same six people (three women, three men) about the past, the present and the future, about his family life and the companies he started. Each act ends when Jobs leaves this interstitial space to go out on to the historical stage, to deliver a now legendary presentation to an audience we're never quite part of. Between acts, there's a brisk montage of the historical media responses to each new generation of computer: a highly compressed exposition – disappointing sales, Jobs fired by John Sculley, the Apple-NeXT merger, Sculley fired by Jobs, and so on. If *The Social Network* depicted a monster among monsters, Michael Fassbender's serene alien android is a wounded angel among angels, who learns to be decent in around two hours.

The real Jobs behaved abominably towards the mother of his child, was a notorious bully in the workplace and an unprincipled slyboots in some of his dealings. But while we get a fair onscreen portrait of the first and a scattering of once-for-all stand-ins for the second and third, the elegance of form dilutes the effect. Plus, we never once see a trace of any downside to the changes these inventions have foisted on us, whether it's conditions in the Chinese factories where computers are assembled or the ripples of pay-corroding disruption travelling far out into unrelated industries. We're in the bubble with Steve and – despite the intractable quarrels – it's a nice bubble, its corridors and backrooms clean, engagingly lit and designer-fashioned. The utopianism goes unconfronted, as if it's a fact in the world, not a proposal for discussion.

"You're not a programmer! You're not a coder! What are you?" Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak shouts at Jobs at one point. Well, the film is housed in three theatres and structured by three unseen performances, so the answer isn't far to seek. And Boyle and Sorkin are correct: all politics – including office politics and the politics of sales and the market – is always partly theatre, and so are ordinary family relationships and dealings with friends and colleagues. Jobs was a master at winning internal battles by charming the wider public, and he's allowed here to savour both victory in his field *and* the getting of emotional wisdom, and we can't help feeling that the second somehow follows from the first. But there's a difference between proving you're right and a happy resolution for all. In the tangle of his best-written confrontations, Sorkin is aware of this – and Boyle certainly knows how to frame and pace the interplay of this kind of material – but in the end (and the ending here is the letdown), both are deft populist sentimentalists who aren't always quite as wise or deep as they perhaps imagine.

Apple seeds: Kate Winslet, Michael Fassbender

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mark Gordon
Guymon Casady
Scott Rudin
Danny Boyle
Christian Colson
Screenplay
Aaron Sorkin
Based on the book by Walter Isaacson
Director of Photography
Alwin Küchler
Edited by
Elliot Graham
Production Designer
Guy Hendrix Dyas
Music
Daniel Pemberton
Production Sound Mixer
Lisa Pinero
Costume Designer
Suttirat Larlarb

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Production Companies
Universal Pictures and Legendary Pictures present a Scott Rudin, Entertainment 360, Mark Gordon Company, Decibel Films, Cloud Eight Films production
A Danny Boyle film
Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./ Fuji Television Network, Inc.
Executive Producers
Bernard Bellew
Bryan Zuriff
Eli Bush

Cast

Michael Fassbender
Steve Jobs
Kate Winslet
Joanna Hoffman
Seth Rogen
Steve Wozniak
Jeff Daniels
John Sculley
Michael Stuhlbarg
Andy Hertzfeld
Katherine Waterston
Chrisann Brennan
John Ortiz
Joel Pforzheimer
Sarah Snook
Andrea Cunningham
Adam Shapiro
Avie Tevanian
Makenzie Moss
Lisa Brennan aged 5
Ripley Sobo
Lisa Brennan aged 9
Perla Haney-Jardine
Lisa Brennan aged 19

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

US, January 1984. Steve Jobs prepares to unveil the Apple Macintosh computer. Backstage he argues with ex-partner Chrisann, engages with his six-year-old daughter Lisa, spars with Apple's co-founder Steve Wozniak and CEO John Sculley and bullies programmer Andy Herzfeld. Head of Apple communications Joanna Hoffman attempts to get him on stage in time. He agrees to give Chrisann more money. Herzfeld finds a cheat to allow the Macintosh to speak, and Jobs bounds on stage.

October 1988. Jobs, who's been ousted from Apple by Sculley, prepares to unveil the NeXT computer. Backstage he once again argues with Chrisann. Wozniak, Herzfeld and Sculley are there to congratulate him, even though they're also all suing him. Jobs talks about computers with Lisa, now ten. Wozniak tells Jobs that NeXT will fail; he says he knows this. He agrees to give Chrisann more money, and tells Hoffman of his sly plan behind the failing NeXT; she explains why Lisa asks him questions, and Lisa asks to live with him.

By May 1998, Apple has bought NeXT and Jobs has returned to the company; Sculley has been sacked. Jobs prepares to unveil the iMac and once again is seen backstage arguing with Chrisann and sparring with Hoffman, Hertzfeld, Wozniak and his father-figure Sculley, whom he tells about the pain of being adopted and seemingly unwanted. He makes up with the estranged Lisa, now 19, promising her that he will replace her Sony Walkman with what will become the iPod.

Steve McQueen The Man & Le Mans

United Kingdom 2015
Directors: Gabriel Clarke, John McKenna
Certificate 15 102m 10s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It certainly doesn't rank among Steve McQueen's most fondly remembered titles but the dramatically inert 1971 car-racing drama *Le Mans* holds some residual intrigue in that it illustrates the limitations of the star's taciturn, rebellious screen persona when deprived of an effective script – and reveals his capacity to force a troubled production through to completion by dint of sheer personal enthusiasm and marquee-value clout. That much is certainly laid out in this feature documentary, which is essentially made possible by the availability of outtake footage from the film's lengthy and traumatic shoot, much of which involved McQueen and a team of professional grand prix drivers restaging the action of the famed French 24-hour race with cameras mounted on high-speed racing cars. McQueen had already channelled his passion for automotive thrills into the hugely successful *Bullitt* (1968), made under the umbrella of his own company Solar Productions, and had persuaded Cinema Center (then the movie division of CBS television) to fund the Le Mans project without a finished script in place before filming started in France.

McQueen himself was talented enough behind the wheel to have taken up racing professionally, coming second to Mario Andretti in the notable 12 Hours of Sebring event in Florida in 1970. Hollywood insurers put the kibosh on the star's plan to compete in the Le Mans race, but the never-to-be-repeated risk-taking authenticity with which the production crew restaged it with McQueen in the driver's seat of his Porsche 917 continues to give the movie genuine cachet among motorsports fans.

However, this documentary proves relatively unambitious in its scope. It fails to make the case that the professional low point of losing his salary to get the film finished had any genuine lasting impact on McQueen or the wider industry, and barely mentions the elephant in the room – one Paul Newman, who'd integrated footage from the 1968 Indianapolis 500 into his 1969 racing drama *Winning* and later went on to his own successful subsidiary career on the racing circuit.

With interview material here from McQueen's son Chad and the star's first wife Neile Adams, there's also a lingering suspicion that the filmmakers are going slightly easy on darker aspects of McQueen's behaviour, which print biographies have previously noted, including his debilitating drugs use and repeated beatings of the long-suffering Adams while he continued his own womanising ways. Instead, the archive on-location footage plays up the enigmatic cool of McQueen's familiar onscreen image. It's apparent, though, that his abiding fascination with speed and cars rather blinded him to the need to give *Le Mans* a connecting narrative thread, essentially scuppering the production's chances by precipitating conflict with original director John Sturges and bringing in a cavalcade of writers to flail away at fixing the script in an on-set caravan. *Steve McQueen: The Man & Le Mans* gives us the factual rundown on all this but little else beyond, making it akin to a useful DVD extra but not quite compelling enough as a standalone proposition.

Fast track: Steve McQueen, Neile Adams

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by John McKenna
Written by Gabriel Clarke
Director of Photography Matt Smith
Film Editor Matt Wylie
Composer Jim Copperthwaite
Sound Recordist Terry Hird
Supervising Sound Re-recording Mixer George Foulgham

©The Man & Le Mans
Executive Producers Andrew Marriott, Bonamy Grimes, Barry Smith, Chad McQueen, David Green, David Reeder, Jamie Carmichael
Film Extracts *Le Mans* (1971)

In Colour

Distributor The Works UK Distribution Ltd

A documentary about the making of actor Steve McQueen's 1971 film 'Le Mans', a drama unfolding during the famous French 24-hour race. After appearing in hit movies including 'Bullitt' and 'The Thomas Crown Affair', by the end of the 1960s McQueen was at the height of his fame; he had a passion for racing driving, having competed professionally, and his influence in Hollywood enabled him to force through the Le Mans project.

The documentary features outtakes from the original shoot and previously unheard audio from an interview McQueen did in 1980 while battling terminal illness. It reveals the star's perfectionism in attempting to make the restaged race footage as dangerously authentic at possible, and also suggests a certain blind egotism in his determination to proceed without a finished script. As his son Chad McQueen (who became a professional racing driver himself) revisits the Le Mans course today, the travails of the production are retraced, including the resignation of original director John Sturges, McQueen's tentative acceptance of his replacement Lee H. Katzin and the mid-shoot accident in which racing driver David Piper lost a leg. Ultimately, the completed film was a commercial and critical disappointment, though it remains popular with motorsports fans. McQueen, who was a notable absentee at the premiere, never drove a racing car again. The film suggests that the asbestos lining the drivers' jumpsuits may have contributed to the rare cancer that took McQueen's life at the age of 50.

Tangerine

USA 2015
Director: Sean Baker
Certificate 15 87m 45s

See Feature on page 36

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

You might assume that the most remarkable thing about Sean Baker's touching and occasionally hilarious neo-screwball is the fact that it was shot on a handful of iPhones. The phones in question were only slightly modified – fitted with Kickstarter-funded lens adapters and software that allowed Baker to lock exposure and focus to his own specifications – but the result sits very comfortably on the big screen and never feels like a home movie. In fact, this zero-budget work-around produces a dreamlike, colour-saturated effect that perfectly matches the drug-tinged hyperreality of its protagonists' lives on the seedier streets and corners of Tinseltown. Likewise, working with minimal equipment allowed the small crew to roam around their locations without drawing attention to themselves, giving the film an edgy, guerrilla feel. But just as impressive is the quality of the performances, and the sheer big-heartedness of the story, which traces one incident-packed Christmas Eve in the lives of two transgender sex workers. The immediacy of the handheld camerawork – coupled with the actors' semi-improvised dialogue, which is mostly drawled out in long strings of slang-peppered invective – plunges the viewer straight in at the deep end of their hardscrabble existence, where they eke out a precarious living while battling to maintain some dignity in the face of the ridicule and disgust of mainstream society. The result is so grippingly watchable that the type of camera being used is really neither here nor there.

As played by Kitana Kiki Rodriguez and Mya Taylor – both appearing for the first time on film – best friends Sin-Dee and Alexandra are both heroic and deeply flawed. Taylor plays Alexandra as the quieter, more cautious of the two, though her sweetness has a flinty edge that becomes more apparent as the plot thickens. In contrast, Sin-Dee, as played by Rodriguez, is a tornado of rage and emotional venting from the very first scene: having learnt that her pimp and supposed fiancé Chester (talented character actor James Ransone) has been cheating on her with a cisgender woman, she sets off to find them both and bring hellfire raining down on those who dare to disrespect her.

Interwoven with this love-rat revenge plot is another domestic drama: Armenian cab driver Razmik (regular Baker collaborator Karren Karagulian) is a long-term john of Alexandra's and is, perhaps, in love with her. His own Christmas Eve has brought about a crisis in his marriage as he walks out on the suffocating festive meal prepared by his wife and overbearing mother-in-law (Luiza Nersisyan and Alla Tumanian respectively) and goes in search of Alexandra. For her part, Alexandra can think only about her big debut as the singer in a local bar; she has invested everything into what she hopes will be a life-changing opportunity, but will Razmik get there in time to show her some support?

By bringing these two disrupted love stories together, Baker teases out unexpected subtleties in a film that mostly majors on broad farce. The popular image of trans women as trashy, tart-with-a-heart loudmouths in impossible heels is a cliché that he can't dodge and doesn't try to;

Phone zone: Mya Taylor, Kitana Kiki Rodriguez

instead, he allows the context that creates and explains them to gleam around the edges: the precarious poverty that informs their everyday choices, and the emotional vulnerability that makes them a magnet for heartbreak. Razmik, likewise, begins as a stock character – this time the hardworking but henpecked immigrant – but then becomes far more complex as the film gets under his skin. A series of vignettes supplied by his hotchpotch of taxi customers adds some welcome light relief to the narrative thread of Sin-Dee's intense melodrama, but Karagulian's sympathetic performance brings home the conflicted yearning of his romantic aspirations with the full force of tragedy.

As well as the men who are attracted to Sin-Dee and Alexandra, Baker also insists that we consider the plight of the cisgender woman, Dinah (Mickey O'Hagan), who has taken up with Chester and must now answer to Sin-Dee. Dinah is a sleazy type with a bitchy attitude, but if she were ever invited to check her privilege, she'd have trouble finding any. Her life turning conveyor-belt tricks in a fleapit motel looks a lot worse than Sin-Dee's defiantly freelance existence, and the two women come together in strange moments of mutual understanding as the intersections of their lives are brought to the surface. This generosity towards Dinah is typical of a film that never settles for obvious polarities or entrenches its characters in two-dimensional assumptions about their moral or strategic priorities.

As Sin-Dee drags Dinah through the streets like a medieval scarlet woman, the audience is pulled along just as insistently. *Tangerine* takes you by the scruff of your neck into a parallel world where tattered reality is shot through with neon flashes of colour, clarity and pure emotional honesty.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Marcus Cox
Karrie Cox
Darren Dean
Shih-Ching Tsou
Sean Baker
Written by
Sean Baker
Chris Bergoch
Cinematography
Radium Cheung
Sean Baker
Editor
Sean Baker
Location Sound Recording
Irin Strauss
Costume Designer
Shih-Ching Tsou

©Tangerine Films, LLC
Production Companies
Magnolia Pictures, Duplass Brothers Productions and Through Films present in association with Cre Film and Freestyle Picture Company a film by Sean Baker
Executive Producers
Mark Duplass
Jay Duplass

Cast
Kitana Kiki Rodriguez
Sin-Dee Rella
Mya Taylor
Alexandra
Karren Karagulian
Razmik
Mickey O'Hagan
Dinah
Alla Tumanian
Ashken
James Ransone
Chester
Luiza Nersisyan
Yeva
Arsen Grigoryan
Karo

In Colour [2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

Present-day Los Angeles, Christmas Eve. Transgender sex worker Sin-Dee's first day out of prison after a four-week sentence starts badly: her best friend Alexandra lets slip that her pimp-cum-boyfriend Chester has been seeing someone else – and this new girlfriend was born female. Determined to punish the upstart girl, Sin-Dee eventually tracks down a hooker called Dinah in the motel where she is working, and drags her out by the hair. Alexandra, meanwhile, is due to make her debut performance as a singer at a local bar, and is desperate to whip up some interest in the show. The one person who should be there is Armenian cab driver Razmik, a long-term customer who is secretly in love with her, but he has his own problems in the form of a demanding wife and constantly complaining mother-in-law. In the end, Sin-Dee and Dinah are the only people who witness Alexandra's big moment. When Sin-Dee finally confronts Chester, she learns that Alexandra too has slept with him. The big showdown is interrupted first by Razmik and then his appalled mother-in-law; with everyone's life in meltdown, Sin-Dee and Alexandra realise that they have only each other to rely on.

Tell Spring Not to Come This Year

United Kingdom/USA 2015
Directors: Saeed Taji Farouky, Michael McEvoy

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

As wars often do, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 gave the English language a neologism: embedded journalist. While a reporter following soldiers in a war was nothing new, the praxis of embedded journalism simultaneously lent itself to greater government control of what did and didn't make it into media outlets (in 2013, a US court ruled that embedded journalists have no constitutionally protected right to freedom of press), while also allowing the journalists to be extremely close to the action and the servicemen around them. (Above all, it seems to be an approach that leaves the reader/viewer, regardless of their political leanings, sympathetic to the struggles of those who serve.) This particular level of access, as well as its visual conventions (ie shots of the Iraqi countryside from inside an M2 Bradley armoured tank) and restrictions (ie not showing dead soldiers' faces), has come to define the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq for those in the west.

So it seems only appropriate that, during the period when US and Nato forces were withdrawing from Afghanistan and ceding responsibility to national forces, this embedded approach should be handed over as well. Over the course of 2014, filmmaker Saeed Taji Farouky and Michael McEvoy, a former liaison for the British Army, followed a company of the Afghan National Army stationed in Helmand province, and in doing so provided us with a perspective that has been overlooked in the past. Rather than subjecting viewers to stultifying talking heads, the filmmakers weave audio commentary from Commander Jalaluddin and Private Sunnatullah over their unit's daily tasks, whether domestic or involving arms – not once do you see them speak directly to camera in an isolated, static space created expressly for interviews. Although it's a very simple aesthetic decision, it elevates *Tell Spring Not to Come This Year* above the vast majority of documentaries dealing with this conflict (such as 2010's *Restrepo*) and at times brings to mind Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1998): these soldiers might be poor and/or illiterate, but the complexity of

Tell Spring Not to Come This Year

their observations about the war and the world around them are more often than not profound, revealing a wisdom shaped by their repeated encounters with death.

The film's title is a line from a poem by Khalilullah Khalili, a writer and ambassador who went into exile following the Soviet-Afghan War and whose poems were distributed on cassette during that conflict as an inspiration to those fighting; before embarking on a crucial mission, Jalaluddin reads the entire, haunting verse.

Jalaluddin and Sunnatullah are extremely frank about their motivations for joining up ("Why would I lie to you? I was unemployed"), their feelings about the withdrawal ("We want them to pull out, we should defend our own country – but 2014 is not the time") and their frustrations over grunt work such as washing carpets. As the filmmakers follow the unit on patrol, the problems that have persisted since the start of the conflict come sharply into focus, even without the benefit of explanatory voiceover. When Jalaluddin and his company travel to a police checkpoint that has been firing at their base at night, unsure if those police officers are not secretly allied with the Taliban, the army finds that everyone there, save for the cook, speaks only Pashto. (The Pashtuns, whose lands span between Afghanistan and Pakistan, have been lobbying for an independent state for decades, and are a crucial part of the insurgency.) It is a while before they find a shared language and, after a brief interrogation, Jalaluddin undiplomatically demands that the cook tell his superiors: "If this continues, we'll kill all ten of you and throw you into the river."

The film's most agonising and damning sequence takes place after the company has been transferred to Sangin, where what is intended to be a 24-hour stint turns into a 45-day stay. After the Taliban takeover of a (different) police checkpoint stocked with rocket launchers and high-grade assault rifles, the company begins to take heavy losses, and Jalaluddin repeatedly calls for back-up. Over the course of what could be five hours (based on the movement of the sun), that support fails to show. As the men narrowly escape with their lives, it becomes clear that the end of this war is as imperceptible as its guerrillas. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Saeed Taji Farouky
Michael McEvoy
Elizabeth C. Jones
Cinematographer
Saeed Taji Farouky
Editor
Gareth Keogh
Composer
Joe Lewis
Location Sound
Michael McEvoy

©Tourist With a Typewriter Ltd
Production Companies
Saboteur Media presents a Tourist With a Typewriter production with Ponda Films
Co-producers: Ponda Films and NHK Cosmomedia Europe
Executive Producers
Scott Brown
Robert Elliott
David Kennedy
Nick Quested

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

This documentary, filmed in Helmand province in Afghanistan, follows a company of the Afghan National Army during the withdrawal of Nato/US troops in 2014, a time of increased aggression by the Taliban.

Unbranded

USA 2015
Director: Phillip Baribeau

Reviewed by Alex Dudok de Wit

The Wild West of the movies is a barren land, inhospitable and unbound by laws. But, as so often, the movies diverge from reality, as this amiable documentary makes clear. Early on, it establishes that the West is actually overcrowded, albeit with wild horses and donkeys, as a result of the outdated legislation that protects them on public land. To control their population and prevent overgrazing, the authorities annually round up thousands of horses and dump them in Dickensian 'holding facilities', where the forlorn beasts await adoption. The American frontier, once the vanguard of freedom, is now the last word in animal captivity.

So goes the conservationist message that meanders through *Unbranded*. But, to be frank, the filmmakers' attention is elsewhere. More than a polemic or a piece of investigative journalism, this is a good ol'-fashioned adventure flick: the meat of the film is an account of a journey from Mexico to Canada, undertaken on horseback by four Texans fresh out of university in summer 2013. That they have adopted their mustangs from said facilities and trained them for the saddle is impressive, and it sets up the film's occasional diversions into political backstory, but for the most part it feels irrelevant.

Unbranded hits our screens at the height of a fad for trekking movies, chief among them *Wild* and *Tracks*. But while those two films are intimate dramas centred on troubled individuals, this is a lighter affair – a real-life mismatched-buddy caper starring four bickering college kids whose interests include boozing, fly-fishing and *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Their mix of bromantic gaiety and passion for the sublime outdoors is engaging (think the gang in *The Deer Hunter* before they go to war). But they're not prone to introspection, and any psychological interest has to be gleaned from their off-the-cuff comments about the horses: "There's not enough room out there for them," one of the men says to camera in a revealing moment, "and there's not enough room for us."

The team's laidback good humour gives the film its charm, but it also rather flattens the drama. They encounter genuine dangers along the way – droughts, forest fires, a nail-biting crossing over the Grand Canyon – but they greet each one with such cheery insouciance that it's hard to feel there's much at stake.

This might have been remedied had more effort been made to tie their quest into the campaign to protect wild horses in the region. A handful of talking heads and cursory onscreen titles fill in the context: we learn that the mustang population in the West is twice the sustainable size, and that conservationists, private ranchers and animal-rights activists are bitterly divided over whether and how to reduce their numbers. By adopting 14 incarcerated horses (and one donkey), our guys are doing their bit to give the animals a meaningful life. But, crucially, we never hear their thoughts on the wider problems, apart from a vague exhortation by their ringleader Ben to make the right "management choices".

Phillip Baribeau, in his first feature as director, might have pressed his subjects on the issue. Instead, he's content to pad out his film with time-lapse footage of the night sky and rousing slo-mo shots of the four horsemen galloping across the wild plains. The result is fun, well-meaning and a tad sophomoric – like the lads themselves. S

Praising saddles: *Unbranded*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Dennis Aig
Producers
Ben Masters
Phillip Baribeau
Conceived by
Ben Masters
Directors of Photography
Phillip Baribeau
Korey Kaczmarek
Edited by
Scott Chestnut
Music
Noah Sorota
Sound Designer
Matt Davies

©Fin & Fur Films, LLC
Production Companies
Fin and Fur Films in association with Cedar Creek Productions presents an Implement production
Co-executive Producer: Pegasus Productions, LLC
Executive Producers
Cindy Meehl
Cami Goff
John C. Goff
Jerry Hodge
Margaret Hodge
Doug Bratton
Anne Marie Bratton

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary tracking the 3,000-mile journey in summer 2013 of four friends from Texas who, on finishing their studies, decide that they are not yet ready for the world of work. Instead, they adopt 14 wild horses from a government holding facility and resolve to train them and ride them from the Mexican border to Canada. Along the way they argue, reconcile, hook up with well-wishing friends and strangers and lose a couple of horses. Ben Masters is the most experienced horseman of the four and the driving force behind the trip; he causes tensions when he insists that the group complete the entire journey on horseback. Four months after setting off, the friends reach Canada.

Expository scenes fill in the background issues surrounding the American West's wild horses. A 1971 law protecting horses and donkeys on public land caused their population to grow dramatically, after which the Bureau of Land Management was charged with removing excess horses to prevent overgrazing. These horses are held in miserable conditions in holding facilities; though they are offered for adoption, few are taken. Conservationists, ranchers and activists are at loggerheads over the question of population control.

Under Milk Wood

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Kevin Allen
Certificate 15 86m 43s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, originally broadcast by the BBC on 25 January 1954 with the 28-year-old Richard Burton as First Voice, can well claim to be the most famous and best-loved radio play ever written. The immediate question, as with Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (which probably ranks as number two), is – can visuals add anything? Or do they, as with the TV and film versions of *Hitchhiker's Guide*, actually detract from the imaginative scope of the audio originals?

Thomas's lyrical prose poem of a play has been filmed before, in 1972, in a version directed by Andrew Sinclair. (There have also been three TV adaptations.) Sinclair's film was heavy with stars – besides Burton, reprising his radio role, there was Elizabeth Taylor (sadly miscast, but mercifully on screen only briefly), Peter O'Toole, Vivien Merchant, Siân Phillips, Glynis Johns et al – and tended to push the mood into 'jolly romp' territory. It also introduced a new character, Norma Jean, who had a three-way roll in the hay (literally) with Burton and Ryan Davies, playing Second Voice – a crude scene, and one never written by Thomas.

Kevin Allen's new film takes fewer liberties with the original. All the characters, and all the words, are Thomas's. But there are a good many cuts – more than there needed to be, perhaps, given the film's fairly modest running time. Several characters have been excised entirely: the vengeful puritan Jack Black, out on a nightly hunt for sinners; undertaker Evans the Death; the gloriously nutty Lord Cut-Glass with his multitude of clocks; Bessie Bighead; Utah Watkins. And lovers of the play may well miss some of their favourite passages – the schoolchildren's teasing kissing-game, or Organ Morgan's encounter (as he thinks) with the shade of J.S. Bach on a chapel tombstone. ("Johann Sebastian mighty Bach! Oh Bach fach!")

There are also a few missteps, serious or otherwise: an episode of Busby Berkeley-ish choreography, shot God's-eye from above, and a couple of silent-movie-style title cards that don't seem to serve much purpose. And having the Rev Eli Jenkins, spouting his pedestrian bardic verses, borne aloft in a canoe by four burly grass-skirted Polynesian warriors just feels bizarre. The worst miscalculation of all is to have Mrs Ogmore-Pritchard, delivering her fearsome catechism to the shades of her two dead husbands ("And before you let the sun in, mind it wipes its shoes!"), attired in BDSM Nazi gear and lashing them with a crop.

In general, though, Allen catches Thomas's mix of mockery and melancholia well. The all-Welsh cast is uniformly strong: as First Voice and the blind Captain Cat, Rhys Ifans effectively eclipses memories of Burton's more orotund tones, and Charlotte Church makes an appealingly sensual Polly Garter, reaching across the generations to her soulmates, the ageing but still life-loving Mary Ann Sailors and aspirant nympho Mae Rose Cottage.

This is a highly tactile film: Allen's camera lovingly nuzzles the texture of water and stone, wood and glass, cloth, grass and seaweed, and the sense of the sea is omnipresent. (It was shot on location at Solva on the Pembrokeshire coast.) But the insidious, pervading question remains: does the visual element add anything worthwhile, or does Thomas's play still feel richer imaginatively and yes, visually, in the medium for which it was created? For this reviewer, brought up as I was on the rich verbal magic of the original, there's no contest. Those coming fresh to the whole concept may feel differently. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Stephen Malit, Kevin Allen
Written by Dylan Thomas
Adapted Screenplay Murray Lachlan Young, Michael Breen, Kevin Allen
Director of Photography Andy Hollis
Editor Sara Jones
Production Designer Marie Lanna
Composer Mark Thomas
Sound Mixer Mike Shoring
Costume Designer Charlotte Mitchell

©Captain Cat Ltd
Production Companies S4C, Tinopolis, Goldfinch Pictures in association with Ffilm Cymru Wales present a fFATTi fFILMS production A Kevin Allen film A fFATTi fFILMS production with S4C, Tinopolis, Goldfinch Pictures and Ffilm Cymru Wales
Executive Producers Ron Jones, Gwawr Martha Lloyd, Kirsty Bell, Hannah Thomas

Cast
Rhys Ifans 1st voice/Captain Cat
Charlotte Church Polly Garter
William Thomas Eli Jenkins
Steffan Rhodri Mog Edwards
Nia Roberts Myfanwy Price
Bradley Freegard Sinbad
Sara Lloyd-Gregory Gossamer Beynon
Sue Roderick Mrs Pugh
Boyd Clack Mr Pugh
Helen Griffin Mrs Willy Nilly
Matthew Owen Willy Nilly
Carwyn Glyn Mr Pritchard
Buddug Verona James Mrs Ogmore-Pritchard
Rhodri Meilir Mr Ogmore
Mair Rowlands Mrs Cherry Owen
Dion Davies Cherry Owen
Lisa Palfrey Mrs Dai Bread 1
Di Botcher Mrs Dai Bread 2
Crisian Emanuel Rosie Probert
Aneirin Hughes Organ Morgan
Karen Elli Mrs Organ Morgan
Llyr Evans Nogood Boyo
Carys Eleri Lily Smalls
Saran Morgan Mae Rose Cottage
Sharon Morgan Mary Ann Sailors
Carlton Bunce PC Atilla Rees
Nicholas McGaughey Butcher Beynon
Menna Trussler 2nd voice
Ray Jones Dai Bread
Dai Protheroe Mr Waldo
Sharon Morgan Mary Ann Sailors

In Colour [2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor Metrodome Distribution Ltd

Shot back-to-back in English- and Welsh-language versions.

Welsh-language version title **Dan y Wenallt**
running time: 86m 44s

Two offscreen voices, one male and one female, introduce us to Llareggub, a small Welsh coastal town, seemingly sometime in the early 1950s. We begin at night, with everyone asleep, and are shown the dreams of the town's residents: Captain Cat, a blind former seaman; the Rev Eli Jenkins, minister and poet; Polly Garter, the town's good-time girl; twice-widowed Mrs Ogmore-Pritchard, attended by the ghosts of her two husbands; serial adulterer Mr Waldo; Organ Morgan, the chapel's Bach-obsessed organist; Mr Pugh, who dreams of poisoning his termagant wife; Dai Bread the baker, happily living bigamously with his two wives; Willy Nilly, the postman who steams open everyone's mail; Mog Edwards, a draper yearning for dressmaker Myfanwy Price; lusty, boozy Mr and Mrs Cherry Owen; schoolteacher Gossamer Beynon, object of uncouth Sinbad Sailors's hopeless devotion; Nogood Boyo, always chasing the girls; teenage Mae Rose Cottage, looking forward to losing her virginity and becoming a wicked girl; and various others, including a chorus of censorious town gossips.

We follow these characters over 24 hours, learning of their lives and fantasies as they interact with each other.

The Walk

USA 2015
Director: Robert Zemeckis
Certificate PG 123m 0s

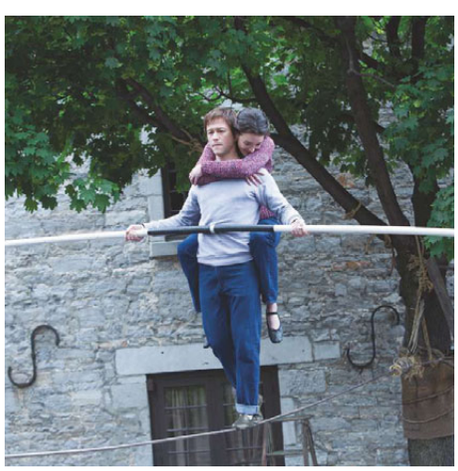
Reviewed by Sam Davies

There were two voids in *Man on Wire*, James Marsh's 2008 documentary. One was the yawning 110-storey space beneath Philippe Petit's feet as he walked on a steel wire between the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center. The other lay in the fact that only still images of Petit's extraordinary stunt existed: at the very height of Marsh's film, there was no actual film.

So here is *The Walk*, Robert Zemeckis's dramatised vision of Petit's great 'coup' of 1974, in which the full technical might of Hollywood CGI, 3D and Imax are recruited to fill that gap. But before that one almighty set piece, so big they named the film after it, there must be a story. So Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Petit introduces himself perched on the Statue of Liberty's torch with the twin towers over his shoulder, and takes us back to the start. We see Petit discovering the circus as a child, learning the rope, scraping by as a busker, falling in love too with a girl and, crucially, falling in love with a photograph of the World Trade Center.

All of this is standard Hollywood storytelling: the hows and whys of motivation and character that brought Petit to take that critical step in which he transfers his weight from tower to wire. Yet as Petit himself famously told the NYPD, "There is no why." Marsh's decision to treat the story as a heist film, focusing on the minutiae of the stunt's mechanics rather than finding the origins of an *idée fixe* in biographical backstory, acknowledged as much. It doesn't help here that Gordon-Levitt as Petit covers the full dramatic range from impish twinkle to twinkling impishly. It is hard, frankly, not to root for gravity in certain scenes.

When *The Walk* finally gets to the walk, Zemeckis pulls out all the stops – then chucks the stops out of the window. We see Gordon-Levitt from above, from below, from each side, from each tower, in gyroscopic tracking shots, in wide shots, in close-ups on his face, in close-ups on his injured foot. And yes, your palms sweat and your stomach lurches. But after 15 minutes staring into the yawning void, you begin to yawn back. The average rollercoaster achieves similar effects, which calls to mind a previous 3D Imax outing by Zemeckis, 2004's *The Polar Express*, which padded out Chris Van Allsburg's short children's book to feature



Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Charlotte Le Bon

length with runaway-train sequences.

It's hard in the end to think of a single aspect of Petit's feat that is better served by Zemeckis's treatment than Marsh's. Marsh banned any kind of nod, implicit or explicit, to the towers' eventual fate, aware that viewers would bring their own awareness. Zemeckis by contrast has Charlotte Le Bon as Petit's girlfriend breathe: "You've given them a soul!" Shortly afterwards, the film fades, very, very slowly, on an image of the towers burnished by an elegiac sunset.

The Walk makes clear that Marsh's reliance on stills was a strength, not a weakness. It invested his film's payoff with an entirely appropriate stillness and a sense of balance. Zemeckis, working so hard to re-enact Petit's performance with noisy pyrotechnical magic, misses that it is above all a marvel of intellectual rigour – probably one of the most dazzling feats of French rationalism since Pascal's *Pensées*. What is more flawlessly rational, more thrillingly cold-blooded, than to say, if I can walk safely on a wire two feet off the ground, why not at 1,368 feet?

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Steve Starkey
Robert Zemeckis
Jack Rapke
Screenplay
Robert Zemeckis
Christopher Browne
Based on the book
To Reach the Clouds
by Philippe Petit
Director of Photography
Dariusz Wolski
Edited by
Jeremiah O'Driscoll
Production Designer
Naomi Shohan
Music
Alan Silvestri
Sound Designer/ Re-recording Mixer
Randy Thom
Costume Designer
Suttirat Larlarb
Stunt Co-ordinator
Marc Desourdy
Visual Effects and Animation
Atomic Fiction

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Production Companies
TriStar Pictures presents in association with LStar Capital an ImageMovers production
A Robert Zemeckis film
Executive Producers
Cherylanne Martin
Jacqueline Levine
Ben Waisbren

Cast
Joseph Gordon-Levitt
Philippe Petit
Ben Kingsley
Papa Rudy
Charlotte Le Bon
Annie
James Badge Dale
Jean-Pierre, 'J.P.'
Clément Sibony
Jean-Louis
César Domboy
Jean-Francois, 'Jeff'
Benedict Samuel
David
Ben Schwartz
Albert
Steve Valentine
Barry Greenhouse

Dolby Digital
In Colour and Black & White
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Sony Pictures Releasing UK

France, the 1970s. Philippe Petit makes a living as a busker on the streets of Paris, juggling, miming and walking a high wire. Desperate to make his mark, he strings his wire and walks between two towers of Notre-Dame cathedral. When he chances on a photograph of the World Trade Center's nearly completed twin towers, he sees an opportunity for an even more audacious performance. With the help of girlfriend Annie and two 'accomplices', Jean-Louis and Jeff, Petit plans a wire-walk between the 110-storey towers. Petit and his associates travel to New York and carry out extensive reconnaissance of the site, recruiting several New Yorkers to help execute the plan. After sneaking into the towers, Petit and his crew work through the night and succeed in rigging the wire. As day breaks, Petit walks between the two towers several times, even lying down on the wire, before finally surrendering to the police. His punishment is to perform for schoolchildren in Central Park; he is also given a lifetime pass to the World Trade Center's observation deck.

Warriors

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Barney Douglas

Reviewed by Kate Stables

"The eye that has travelled sees further" is a Maasai proverb that could double as the logline for this upbeat documentary on the formation and social activism of the Maasai Cricket Warriors. It's a bustling, cheerful account of how a pilgrimage to play in the 2013 'Last Man Stands' amateur league world championships at Lord's led a team of young Maasai warriors to challenge their tribe's tenacious culture of FGM and female oppression.

Barney Douglas's debut documentary can't be neatly categorised, however. He's woven together an underdog sports story, an intergenerational cultural battle and some judicious 'hidden world' anthropology, but no one strand predominates. The film's various threads often don't hang together tidily – there are narrative transitions bumpier than fast bowler Jonathan's bouncers. So it's an engaging if sometimes ungainly mix of observational documentary and peppily soundtracked cricket montages, sewn together with occasional bursts of cutely angular animation eliding cricket and Maasai hunting.

Douglas has previously produced online content such as the behind-the-scenes 'Swanny's Ashes' video diaries for the England & Wales Cricket Board. Here he levels the same generous, fly-on-the-wall eye on eight teenagers playing with spirit and intensity (and always in traditional dress) on a dusty Kenyan school playground. It's in absolute contrast to the earnest ethnographic feel of, say, Pascal Plisson's 2004 teenage quest drama *Maasai: Rain Warriors*. Here, the *morans* (young warriors) tell their own story, often speaking in English straight to camera: "To us the ball is like a spear, the bat is like a shield." This gives them narrative agency, and the film a fresh, informal feel.

The most valuable player in both film and cricketing terms is charismatic team captain Sonyanga (his teammates are amiably but fleetingly characterised), who is eloquent about the MCW's fierce pride in their culture and their determination to change its darker side. Introducing us to local schools, the players' families and a women's rescue centre for child brides, the film works best when letting the community explain how deeply held Maasai traditions structure their lives. Even the male elders, grumbling under a tree that "you can't touch a woman without her telling you she's got 'human rights'", get a fair hearing. Their fear at losing the ancient right to count their worth in children and cattle is palpable.

Once the MCW are in England for their matches, however, there's a tonal mismatch between ECB cheerleading (James Anderson musing on the magic of Lord's) and the team's valiant stream of lost matches. Dodging the *Cool Runnings* template of match tensions with opposing sides, Douglas opts for a brisk montaged canter through the MCW's flailing batting and wild bowling. His second-skin camerawork picks up their infectious delight when they pull off a win, in a flurry of fallen wickets and neatly plucked catches, and get their day at Lord's.

There's a forgivable whiff of reality TV in the slightly staged MCW-and-elders homecoming meeting, which culminates in an agreement to end FGM and provides the cricketers' quest with its well-earned happy ending. And the film is notably silent on cricket's colonial history as a vehicle for valorising British values, preferring to see it as a modernising force, spreading social change and self-empowerment. For *Warriors*, the team's social activism, rather than its scorecard, is its *raison d'être*. This may be 'the gentleman's game', yet the MCW's cricketing workshops for girls teach them not only sport but also how to claim their place in the world.

Batsman begins: *Warriors*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Barney Douglas
Michael Elson
Director of Photography
Ben Wilkins
Edited by
Julian Rodd
Music
Ali Gavan
Barney Douglas
Sound Recordist
Kat Ward-Lewis

©Heavy Soul Films
Production Companies
Content Media Corporation presents a Heavy Soul Films production
A film by Barney Douglas
Executive Producers
James Anderson
Esther Randall
John Boughtwood
Jamie Carmichael
John Douglas

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Verve Pictures

Kenya, 2013. Coached by South African environmentalist Aliya Bauer, a group of young warriors form a cricket team in the Laikipia National Park, calling themselves the Maasai Cricket Warriors. Their cricket workshops tour local schools, where they also campaign against FGM and female oppression, though the council of elders protests that these traditions are key to Maasai culture. A British Army platoon builds them a proper cricket pitch. Girls in the local women's refuge tell their stories of FGM and child marriage. Invited by the England & Wales Cricket Board to take part in the 'Last Man Stands' amateur league world championship at Lord's, the team train hard. In London, playing in Maasai costume, they are a media sensation, though they lose match after match. Told that they must win one match to play at Lord's, they pull it off. At Lord's, they play well but lose in the semi-final.

Back in Kenya, the team call a meeting to challenge the elders to stop FGM. The elders agree. Team captain Sonyanga has saved his youngest sister from being cut, and there is a village celebration.

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Home cinema

Girl meets world: Diouanna (Mbissine Thérèse Diop) heads for heartbreak in Ousmane Sembène's *La Noire de...* (*Black Girl*)

MAN ON A MISSION

The Senegal-born filmmaker Ousmane Sembène was a Marxist maverick who gave voice to unheard African stories

TWO FILMS BY OUSMANE SEMBENE

BLACK GIRL/BOROM SARRET

Senegal 1966/63; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 60/20 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.33:1; Features: documentary, featurette, interview, colour-sequence version of *Black Girl*, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Ousmane Sembène (1923-2007), often regarded as the father of African cinema, came to moviemaking late. He was 40 before he released his first film, the 20-minute short *Borom sarret*, and made his first feature, *La Noire de...* (*Black Girl*) three years later. By the time he died, aged 84, he had completed nine features, all infused with historical awareness, strong socialist principles and a determination to give voice to unheard African stories. Less often celebrated is the quietly subversive humour that often infiltrates even his most serious subjects.

Born in Senegal, the son of a fisherman, he was expelled from formal education at 13 (apparently for slapping the headmaster) and found work as a manual labourer before being drafted into the French army as an infantryman during World War II. At the end of the war he was discharged for insubordination (does one see a pattern beginning to develop?) and in 1947 migrated to France, where he became a dockworker in Marseille. There he joined the left-wing CGT union, taught himself to read and discovered Marxism.

As an active member of the French Communist Party, Sembène soon made a name for himself as an advocate of black liberation and independence for the colonised African nations. An enthusiastic autodidact, devouring everything he could find in the CP libraries and literary workshops, he decided to become a writer. His first novel, *Le Docker noir* (*The Black Docker*), about an African docker who suffers mistreatment at work and is executed after accidentally killing a white woman, was published in 1956. He went on to write six more novels and four novellas, including *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu* (*God's Bits of Wood*), a fictionalised account of the 1947-48 railroad strike on the Dakar-Niger line that's generally reckoned his finest novel.

Literature always remained Sembène's first love. But he came to realise that it wasn't the best way to reach his intended African audience, many of whom read little or were illiterate. Film offered a more promising medium with a far wider reach. In 1961 he travelled to Moscow for a year to study filmmaking at the Gorky Studios with Mark Donskoi and Sergei Gerasimov, and on his return to Africa he launched his career as a writer-director with *Borom sarret* and *La Noire de...* (A previous documentary short, *L'Empire songhai*, on the pre-colonial empire that dominated the western Sahel in the 15th and 16th centuries, seems to have remained unreleased.)

A key strength of Sembène's work was that, while consistently exposing and condemning the exploitation of Africa by the European colonial powers, he unhesitatingly turned his critical gaze on the way Africans themselves – especially the new African bourgeoisie –

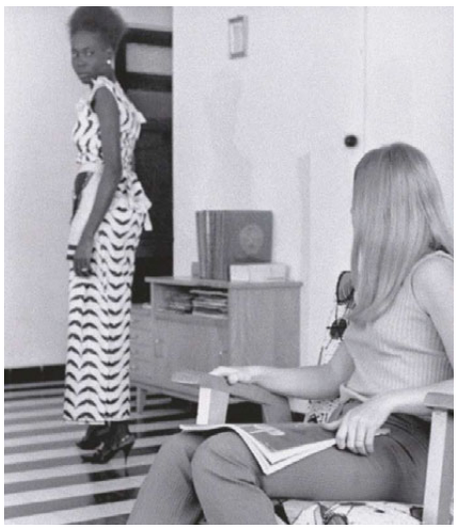
abused their power and exploited their fellow citizens. His Marxist background never misled him into taking a simplistic, blame-it-all-on-the-colonialists attitude to the problems he explored. So while the white French family are the target of his anger in *La Noire de...*, the wretched hero of *Borom sarret* (played by Ly Abdoulaye) is the victim of those around him.

Equipped only with an aged horse and a rickety cart (*borom sarret* is French pidgin for *bonhomme charrette*, or 'cart fellow'), he ekes out a living carrying people and materials around the streets of Dakar. Too easy-going for his own good, he lets his friends and neighbours exploit him, carrying them where they want to go for nothing more than a handshake. There's a preliminary clash with officialdom when he takes a man whose child has died to the cemetery – the father is refused entry for lacking the right documentation. But the cart driver's downfall comes when he lets a smartly dressed man persuade him to take him and his luggage to the posh district of the city up on the hill. Humble carts like his, he knows, are forbidden up there, but the man promises a generous payment and boasts that he "has contacts". Inevitably, the cart driver winds up without his money, fined and with his cart confiscated.

There's a detail in *Borom sarret* that offers a premonition of one of Sembène's most powerful later films, *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987). Producing his papers at the demand of a policeman, the cart driver lets a medal fall in the dust; the cop contemptuously puts his foot over it. Evidently the man has fought for France in the war, but his service stands him in little stead with the policeman – whose attitude foreshadows that of the French army authorities in *Thiaroye*. In that film, based on real-life events, black soldiers returning from combat after World War II are housed in squalid conditions in a holding camp, subjected to racial abuse and cheated of their pay. Their protest is met with lethal brutality.

Reflecting Sembène's inexperience – and that of his actors, who as almost always in his films were non-professionals – all the dialogue in *Borom sarret* is conveyed in voiceover. The same is true of some of the dialogue in *La Noire de...*, though altogether the film shows an increase in the director's confidence and sophistication. It's unique among Sembène's films in that most of the action takes place in France, with brief flashbacks to Dakar; after this, all his films would be set entirely in Africa.

La Noire de... is based on a real-life incident which Sembène had used as inspiration for a short story included in his collection *Voltaïque* (*Tribal Scars*), which he now adapted into the first feature-length film to be produced in sub-Saharan Africa. In Dakar, a young woman, Diouanna (played by the graceful Mbissine Thérèse Diop), is taken on by a French couple to look after their young children. She's overjoyed to have found work, and even more delighted when they ask her to come back to France with them, telling her how beautiful and exciting their country is. But once in Antibes, where the family live, she finds things are very different; rather than just looking after



Diop with Anne-Marie Jelinek in *La Noire de...*

the kids, she's expected to do all the cooking and the housework, she's verbally abused by the wife and all she sees of France is through the windows of the apartment. "I'm a prisoner here – I'm their slave," she reflects. Finally, lonely and wounded by the mistreatment she's suffering, she kills herself.

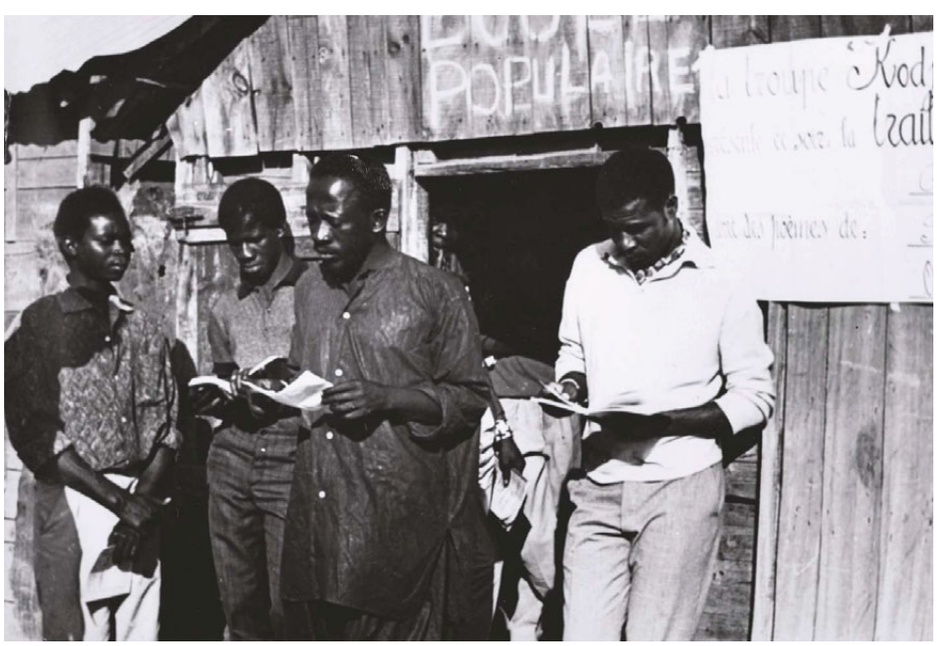
In an extra included on the BFI disc, Diop, interviewed for French TV 40 years after the film was shot, recalls Sembène as a "*dur*" director (hard, difficult), though constrained by his tiny budget. Her chief support during the shoot was fellow cast member Robert Fontaine, playing the French husband, who had been her drama teacher.

He rarely compromised, seeing his films as 'introductions to a universe that we can transform'

If *La Noire de...* has a primary fault, it's in the caricaturing of this French couple, and in particular the wife (Anne-Marie Jelinek). Later Sembène would come to portray his villains with more subtlety. But he makes telling symbolic use of an African mask, first given to the couple by Diouanna in gratitude for employing her, later seen hanging in lonely isolation on the pristine wall of the Antibes apartment. As their relationship sours, Diouanna and the wife tussle over it, and after the young woman's death the husband takes it back to Dakar with her other possessions to return to her family. Diouanna's little brother picks it up, puts it on and follows the discomfited man through the streets – the vengeful spirit of wronged Africa?

All the dialogue in *La Noire de...* is in French – the last time this would happen in Sembène's films. Starting with his next feature, *Mandabi* (*The Money Order*, 1968), his films would be largely or entirely in his native Wolof or in Diola. (*Mandabi*, though, was also made in a French-language version to satisfy its French backers.) Filmmaking was never easy for Sembène; not only did he have to overcome the vagaries of African production and distribution but also, as often as not, the disapproval and censorship of the same national authorities from whom he was obliged to seek funding. But he rarely compromised, seeing his work as a mission and his films as "introductions to a universe that we can transform".

The 4k restorations from Laboratoires Eclair and Cineteca di Bologna, working from the original camera negatives, have gifted both films a cleanness and a clarity not seen for years, if ever – besides adding by way of bonus a version of *La Noire de...* incorporating a 50-second colour sequence. A brief but useful summary of Sembène's career and an informal documentary about the director, featuring several interview sessions with him, round off the package. S



Ousmane Sembène (third from left) with his non-professional cast on the set of *La Noire de...*

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (1)

New releases

ASYLUM

Peter Robinson; UK 1972; OEG Classic Movies/ Region 0 DVD; 91 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: three short films, commentary moderated by Kenneth Robinson

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In the 1960s and 1970s, psychiatrist R.D. Laing became an odd sort of pop guru thanks to his theories about the possible mental harm inflicted by the traditional nuclear family. Laing, the presiding spirit of Peter Robinson's documentary *Asylum*, only appears in a few interview snippets, though the therapists and students who share a house in Archway with a collection (indeed, a collective) of troubled patients are all devout Laingians. There is debate among documentarian purists about the ethics of the extent to which Robinson and his crew became involved in the lives of their subjects, but this makes for gripping drama, by turns hilarious and melancholy. Here, the fly-on-the-wall documentary begins to take a path that will lead to reality TV, albeit with a tact and thoughtfulness that remain touching decades on.

Some of the patients, such as the haunting blonde waif Julia (who sometimes regresses to childhood) and the simmering, besuited Richard (the sole working-class voice heard here), are so committed to what Laing called their 'journeys' that they barely register the camera's presence; others embrace performance as symptom and perhaps therapy. David Bell, a former mathematician, talks non-stop with almost Joycean brilliance, unnerving many but also subliminally making sense.

The drama comes to a head when David's need for attention threatens to unbalance the therapeutic experiment and others try to confront him on the issue, reacting to his aggression but genuinely trying to help him. None of the patients now seems as cracked as the plummy-voiced gentleman farmer who shows up and offhandedly admits that he's arranged a date with a nice young lady for his withdrawn, jittery son because he's worried the lad "might go over to the other side".

Disc: The disc includes three short films in which Laing talks about his ideas and theories. However, the most valuable extra is a commentary track moderated by Kenneth Robinson, the director's son, in which crew members and subjects revisit the film decades on. Given that it's impossible to watch *Asylum* without wanting to know what happened to those involved, viewers are likely to plunge straight from the movie to the commentary; the extras sketch in much more about the subjects – even the enigmatic Julie – while footnoting the film with memories of its making and fond, insightful observations about the inhabitants of the Archway house.

80,000 SUSPECTS

Val Guest; UK 1963; Network/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 117 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: promotional materials gallery

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Val Guest was clearly someone who liked to disturb the placid routine of everyday Macmillan-era Britain. In *Quatermass 2* (1957), alien interlopers were insidiously taking over the country; *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961) saw London sweltering as global obliteration drew near; and *Jigsaw* (1962) suggested sexual transgression and murderous impulses festering away in a quiet corner of the Home Counties.

Here a case of smallpox in a Bath hospital on New Year's Eve prompts an unfolding medical crisis, the disease's lengthy incubation span providing a daunting estimation of 80,000 suspected carriers who need to be vaccinated lest a fatal outbreak sweep across the south-west. The historic Roman Baths and the elegant Georgian crescents provide an effective contrast as police and army vehicles swarm about, while the queue for smallpox jabs snakes endlessly through the central shopping district. Guest's interest, though, isn't exclusively in the procedural details, since the emergency develops alongside the precarious endgame in the marriage of hospital consultant Richard Johnson and his ex-nurse spouse Claire Bloom, driven by their increasingly fractious relationship and a lingering suspicion that he's been unfaithful.

Guest does his best to give both narrative threads equal weight, which proves engrossing up to a point, but the film flags appreciably when the outbreak element peaks too early; and the characterisation on the domestic front never quite delineates the couple's marital malaise with enough insight to make it something special. Still, as in *Jigsaw*, there's a definite sense that old moral certainties have become much more flexible – something Cyril Cusack's presence as a worldly priest makes clear – and Johnson, never the most nimble of performers, puts in a decent shift as the harassed medic realising that he's lost the ability to feel anything much at all.

Disc: A crisp, spotless transfer which really highlights the excellence of cameraman Arthur Grant's night shooting, placing the cast in bold relief against a pitch-black sky.

THE FAMILY SECRET

William A. Seiter; USA 1924; Undercrank Productions/ Region 0 DVD; 60 minutes; 4:3; Features: two restored Baby Peggy shorts, *Circus Clowns* (1922) and *Miles of Smiles* (1923), plus newsreels

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Baby Peggy was a sensation in the 1920s, a gifted toddler who made more than 150 films of great charm and fun – she was the "Kutest Kiddie on the Screen". Since she made a grateful exit from the business that stole her childhood years, Diana Serra Cary, the woman who was once Baby Peggy, has been fighting for the rights of young actors, and attempting to trace copies of films she made nearly 100 years ago – such as this one, 1924's *The Family Secret*, which has been restored by the Library of Congress and released on DVD by musician Ben Model's Undercrank label.

Meet cute: Baby Peggy (left) in *The Family Secret*

The Family Secret is a rather dated drama about a controlling father who disapproves of his daughter's marriage, resulting in husband and wife separating, and the child of their union being raised by a nurse in the patriarch's house of repression. The film plods along until the luckless babe grows to be four years old and Baby Peggy emerges on to the screen, all irrepressible smiles and toddler pranks. All she needs to do is to be so flat-out adorable that she will capture the heart of her estranged father and melt that of mean old grandpa. She does this, with bells on, while the adults around her show next-to-no concern for her welfare.

For a more complete sense of what a Baby Peggy film was, the extras on the disc include two shorts that are classics of the type, in which the star bounces about the set getting up to mischief, and performs "adult" roles with mock-seriousness. *Circus Clowns* (1922) is one of her earliest movies, a one-reel romp that pairs Peggy, as a child stolen and set to work in the big top, with Brownie the dog. *Miles of Smiles* (1923) is more polished and in this Peggy plays twins separated in infancy – one is raised in luxury, the other toils on a tourist train. As Diana Serra Cary would attest, the joke that such a young child would be working for a living may hardly be funny any more. And the bonus footage of Hollywood newsreels showing Peggy "relaxing" at home only underline the fact that this kid never had the happy, carefree childhood she deserved.

Disc: All the films are presented on clean 2k transfers, and have accomplished musical scores by Ben Model playing a "virtual" pipe organ, which replicates the real thing by use of samples.

LEGACY OF SATAN/BLOOD

Gerard Damiano/Andy Milligan; USA 1974; Code Red/Region-free Blu-ray; 70/69 minutes; 1.78:1

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Those in search of a grindhouse *film maudit* double bill need look no further than this Blu-ray pairing of two odd by-blows from notable exploitation/deviant artfilm careers, originally released by the notoriously shady Bryanston Pictures in 1974. Both are brief – albeit longer in these versions than some earlier releases – and yet unfold in fits and starts, with trippy *longueurs* that are as much a part of the experience as the jagged horror moments produced by papier mâché fright masks.

Top billing goes to *Legacy of Satan*, a comparatively chaste outing for Gerard Damiano – who had filled Bryanston's coffers with the returns from his hardcore 1972 hit *Deep Throat*, though this study of an unfulfilled wife ensnared by a demonic cult is tonally closer to his *The Devil in Miss Jones* (1973). Enacted by zombie-like swingers prettily outfitted with robes and sharp quarter-moon medallions, it's a bleak little anecdote that segues from Satan worship to vampirism in its second half.

Blood, a full ten minutes longer here than in the UK video that was previously

THE PAST MASTER

Swept up in the events of 1973, Patricio Guzmán has been sifting indefatigably through Chile's history ever since

FIVE FILMS BY PATRICIO GUZMAN

THE BATTLE OF CHILE (THREE PARTS)/CHILE, OBSTINATE MEMORY/THE PINOCHET CASE/ SALVADOR ALLENDE/NOSTALGIA FOR THE LIGHT

1975-2010; Icarus Films/Region 1 DVD; 262 total/58/109/ 100/90 minutes; 1.33:1/1.85:1/1.85:1/1.85:1/1.85:1; Features: booklet essay by José Miguel Palacios, feature documentary *Filming Obstinately, Meeting Patricio Guzmán* by Boris Nicot (2014), interview with Guzmán by José Carlos Avellar, five short films by Guzmán (*Chile, a Galaxy of Problems*, *Oscar Saa, Technician of the Stars*, *José Maza, Sky Traveller*, *Maria Teresa and the Brown Dwarf*, *Astronomers from My Neighbourhood*)

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

As it happened: Salvador Allende filmed in 1973 for *The Battle of Chile*

There are a handful of filmmakers who have had their careers defined by a moment in history while at the same time actually helping to define how that moment is perceived by the world. Leni Riefenstahl and Claude Lanzmann are two examples of such artists; Patricio Guzmán is another.

A new eight-disc box-set from Icarus Films collects Guzmán's major works, the best-known of these being his *Battle of Chile* triptych – *The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie* (1975), *The Coup d'Etat* (1976) and *Popular Power* (1979) – comprising footage shot during the escalating standoff between the supporters of democratically elected Marxist president Salvador Allende and his increasingly incensed right-wing opponents, concluding with Allende's death during a military coup staged on 11 September 1973 and the seizure of power by a junta headed by General Augusto Pinochet. Together they may be said to form the definitive, essential eyewitness testimony to these events.

With the international success of the *Battle* films, there was a sense that Guzmán had the role of Chile's cinematic conscience thrust upon him, a role that he has striven to fulfil in the years since. This is not a job that anyone sets out to have. In fact, from the time that he was a young man, Guzmán had aspired to be a science-fiction writer (in 2005 he completed *Mon Jules Verne*, a film about the visionary novelist, for French television). But on returning to his native Santiago from film school in Spain, then still under the rule of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, he was swept up in the utopian fervour surrounding Allende's attempt to transform Chile through collectivisation and the nationalisation of industries, and set out to record what he could of the process. Soon Guzmán and his small crew were bearing witness to scenes that went well beyond wildest fantasy, including the fateful, fatal bombardment of the Palacio de la Moneda, where Allende and his outgunned loyalists took their last stand. Reality had taken on a distinctly unreal, even dystopian, cast. Shortly afterward there appeared a reprint of Jack London's 1907 novel *The Iron Heel*, a work of speculative fiction documenting the rise of a repressive oligarchy in the United States, its cover featuring a heavy black boot stamped down on a placard featuring the deposed Chilean president's face and the motto "VIVA ALLENDE".

The *Battle of Chile* films, seen today, have something of the quality of slow-motion crash-test footage. Guzmán and his collaborators – including cinematographer Jorge Müller Silva, who would be among the thousands 'disappeared' during Pinochet's rule – filmed in the chambers of parliament, in the Catholic universities, in the worker-controlled factories of the industrial belts and in the streets, capturing both the gamesmanship of the opposed factions and what the director would later describe as the "state of communal infatuation" inspired in a segment of the population by Allende. Watching the parade of faces go past, you can't help but play the game of wondering who will still be alive 12 months or five years hence.

The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie ends with a sort of dry run for the September putsch in summer 1973, and with an image taken from the camera of Swedish reporter Leonardo Henrichsen as he is coolly gunned down by a rebel soldier. This presages the final moments of *The Coup d'Etat*, in which La Moneda, Allende's last redoubt, is seen in flames. *Popular Power* is a eulogy to the cause going up in smoke, looking at the various participatory measures taken by the supporters of Allende's Popular Unity coalition in order to counter the opposition's attempts to foment social disorder. If *Insurrection*, looking at the destabilising measures of the opposition, is thesis, and *Popular Power*, looking at the Popular Unity response, is antithesis, then *Coup d'Etat* represents a tragic synthesis.

He filmed in the chambers of parliament, in the Catholic universities, in the factories and in the streets

The Battle of Chile is a right-place-at-the-wrong-time filmmaking feat that couldn't very well be duplicated, and Guzmán has never tried to replicate its boots-on-the-ground performance. Instead, he would take his privileged role as witness as a sort of mandate to make certain that the images of the coup, and what they represent, would not be forgotten. *Chile, Obstinate Memory* (1997), for example, is a study in wilful cultural amnesia in which Guzmán stages his own homecoming return-of-the-repressed in Santiago, hiring a marching band to play the Popular Unity anthem and screening the *Battle* films for students who were children when the events depicted took place. The deaths of Silva and Henrichsen, and the turbulent production and post-production of the *Battle* films, are discussed at some length here, including the manner in which the raw footage was smuggled by boat from Valparaíso to Stockholm, where it would begin to be assembled.

Guzmán has never really stopped sifting through these images. *The Pinochet Case* (2001) recounts the events leading to the General's 1998 arrest in London and the legal case that would lead to his loss of legal immunity (and includes Jeremy Corbyn among its talking heads). It opens with a scene of forensic investigation in arid northern Chile: the recovery of bone fragments in a remote site that presumably held the remains of people with whom General Pinochet disagreed. This image of the bereaved scratching through barren soil for the remains of loved ones recurs in *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), a film in which the author of one of the most visceral of *vérité* documents reveals a cosmic perspective that's also evident in some of the short films in Icarus's box – and the aspiring sci-fi writer is reunited with the indefatigable chronicler of Chilean history.

New releases

its most accessible release, is despised even by the devotees of director Andy Milligan – though it offers his usual mix of shrill, shrieking family melodrama and warmed-over famous monsters. Here, in 1885, the son of the Wolf Man (Allan Berendt) and Dracula's daughter (Hope Stansbury) endure an arranged marriage, deplete their devoted servants and distil an all-purpose serum from a cellarful of carnivorous plants. If Damiano's cast seem hypnotised, Milligan's people are hyper-caffeinated – but the film appears almost unfinished, with a climax that involves werewolf fighting vampire in a flaming house, before a comic coda in which the burnt-out mansion gets a new tenant, coyly listed as 'Dr F' in the credits.
Disc: Code Red proudly announces that "due to the high volume of internet complaints, we did not use DNR and kept the grain intact!" The colours are surprisingly vivid, though print damage is evident throughout both films – but, for collectors, an extra ten minutes of Andy Milligan is a valuable find.

THE NAKED PREY

Cornel Wilde; USA 1965; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/ Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 96 minutes; Certificate 12; 2.35:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: Sheldon Hall appreciation, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Originally scripted with a Wyoming setting, this stripped-down survivalist yarn would work in any similarly harsh environment, and its ultimate transplantation to southern Africa raises lots of tacit questions about colonialism and exploitation, even if they're mostly not verbally addressed. Indeed, the trailer's voiceover spells out an anti-colonialist message far more explicitly than does the main feature, surely one of the least talky American films since the talkies were introduced four decades earlier.

Eureka's release is particularly timely in the wake of the international revulsion caused by the exploits of Minnesota dentist/big-game hunter Walter Palmer – he could well be a surrogate for the opening scene's white men, whose unthinking arrogance triggers both their own demise (the inventive tribal butchery on display here anticipates the Italian cannibal genre) and the chase that forms the bulk of the narrative. This starts when Wilde's safari-guide protagonist is, in acknowledgement of his respect for tribal traditions, released naked into the wild and given a head start by his armed pursuers, whom he consistently outwits and occasionally kills throughout the rest of the film.

Unsurprisingly, the film proved controversial from the time it was first released, because Wilde never entirely defuses an abiding impression that it's essentially about a cunning and resourceful white man (identified as 'Man' in the opening credits) triumphing over less intelligent black men. However, unlike Ruggero Deodato (*Cannibal Holocaust*, 1980) and Umberto Lenzi (*Cannibal Ferox*, 1981), Wilde does at least provide a counter-argument: although their unsubtitled Nguni dialogue will be incomprehensible to most English-speaking viewers, individual hunters are characterised with sufficient sympathy and humanity to banish accusations of exploiting

The devil wears kaftans: *Legacy of Satan*

their tribe's alien 'otherness' for flesh-creeping reasons. It's also presumably not insignificant that Wilde's character ultimately can't survive without outside assistance from more than one quarter: for all his impressive physique, he's not quite the superman the ads suggested. Particularly unusually for the period, the film's musical accompaniment is almost entirely traditional and African, aside from a somewhat awkward serenade of 'Little Brown Jug' to a young tribal girl.
Disc: The gorgeous transfer makes the most of H.A.R. Thomson's Panavision and Eastmancolor cinematography, although it also makes the garishly red blood and stock-footage cutaways look even less convincing. Both the disc and booklet (which includes a 1970 interview with Wilde and the source story 'John Colter's Escape') offer valuable context, with Sheldon Hall's vividly told story of the trouble-plagued production being particularly absorbing.

THE OTTO PREMINGER FILM NOIR COLLECTION

FALLEN ANGEL/WHIRLPOOL/ WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS

Otto Preminger; USA 1945/50/50; BFI/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 97/98/95 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: commentaries by Adrian Martin, *Guardian* lecture, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The success of *Laura* (1944), the first of Otto Preminger's films that he cared to acknowledge, set him off on a fruitful half-decade of directing psychologically convoluted *noirs*. It was a style that evidently chimed with his cool, analytic temperament – all the more so by contrast with the lifeless period dramas (*Forever Amber*, *The Fan*) that he was churning out during the same period.

Laura starred Gene Tierney in the title role and Dana Andrews as the police detective who becomes obsessed with her. Andrews's shifty good looks and Tierney's slightly detached beauty – her emotions never seem quite within reach – suited them both for the moral quicksands of *noir*, and Preminger used both actors again in this trio: Andrews in *Fallen Angel*, Tierney in *Whirlpool*, and reuniting them for *Sidewalk*. *Fallen Angel* finds Andrews, a drifter down on his luck in small-town California, marrying virtuous blonde Alice Faye for her cash but smitten with vampy waitress Linda Darnell. Joseph LaShelle, who also photographed *Laura*, plays up the gulf between the two women, with Faye presented in brightly lit daytime interiors and Darnell low-key, as a creature of the night.

Whirlpool is richly melodramatic – sub-Freudian tosh with Tierney as a society

The Naked Prey Transplanted from Wyoming to Africa, this stripped-down survivalist yarn raises lots of tacit questions about colonialism and exploitation

wife with kleptomaniac issues who falls into the hands of a crooked hypnotist (José Ferrer) with a lethal agenda of his own. Richard Conte, as Tierney's husband, comes across chilly and judgemental (their loveless marriage, it's hinted, is what has driven her to steal), while Ferrer chews the scenery with gusto. It's all overblown, implausible and thoroughly enjoyable, and DP Arthur Miller lends it a high-toned gloss.

The darkest of these three is *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. Andrews plays a New York cop whose taste for beating up lowlifes he encounters gets seriously out of hand when he kills a suspect. Tierney is the victim's wife who perversely finds herself falling for her husband's killer. It's gritty, downbeat stuff – LaShelle on camera duty again – edging into the territory of Nicholas Ray's *On Dangerous Ground*, made the following year.

Disc: The BFI set's HD transfers, scanned by Fox at 2K resolution, are flawless and gleaming. Australian film scholar and critic Adrian Martin provides appreciatively detailed commentaries, highlighting Preminger's skill at framing and reframing within long, fluid takes, and noting how "things that look simple are not simple at all". His commentaries apart, the chief extra is an audio recording of a *Guardian* lecture at the NFT in 1972, with Preminger turning on the flirtatious Viennese charm for the benefit of interviewer Joan Bakewell. Visual padding for this consists of a sequence of 15 stills from the three films, repeated multiple times. The booklet simply reruns Edward Buscombe's insert notes from the BFI's previous DVD releases of the movies.

A SENSE OF FREEDOM

John Mackenzie; UK 1981; Odyssey/Region 2 DVD; 95/85 minutes; Certificate 18; 4:3; Features: two versions, documentary (*Sarah's Story*)

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Shot and premiered while *The Long Good Friday* was awaiting release, John Mackenzie's electrifying portrayal of notorious Glasgow hardman Jimmy Boyle has all the strengths of his better-known work, not least a supernaturally effective, clearly physically gruelling central performance, in this case by David Hayman. Neither Mackenzie nor writer Peter McDougall soft-pedals Boyle's pre-prison career: it's clear from the outset that he's a thoroughly nasty piece of work, whether tacitly threatening debtors or carving up opponents (and then casually asking his goons if he's got the right man).

But, as with Krzysztof Kieslowski's *A Short Film About Killing* (1988), the protagonist's lack of apparent redeeming features strengthens McDougall and Mackenzie's moral case: no matter how appalling Scottish prison inmates might be on arrival, in too many cases they emerge worse than when they went in. Boyle's reputation-protecting strategy of aggressive confrontation at every opportunity meets with a predictably Newtonian response from the screws, and they duly trap themselves in a stalemate of ever escalating violence and ineffectual humiliation. In one of the most memorable scenes, a dirty protest staged so graphically that it's hard to avoid an involuntary olfactory reaction, Boyle taunts his disgusted captors with a pointed "My blood turns you on but my shite makes ye cringe."

Where the Sidewalk Ends Andrews's shifty good looks and Tierney's slightly detached beauty suited them both for the moral quicksands of *noir*

Although broadcast only four years after the first version of Alan Clarke's *Scum* proved too much for British TV to handle, Mackenzie's film doesn't downplay anything: the violence is as lightning-quick as it often is in real life, the aftermath horribly prolonged, the pervasive sense of pointless waste all too palpable. Boyle's subsequent rehabilitation in Barlinnie prison's special unit is covered in a surprisingly brief coda, but by then the central point has already been amply made.

Disc: Both the original Scottish TV broadcast and the better-known HandMade Films reworking are included. The latter offers onscreen titles highlighting locations and dates but is otherwise markedly inferior: ten minutes shorter, with the image heavily cropped on all four sides and the soundtrack revoiced with 'milder' Scottish accents than the original unvarnished Glaswegian (subtitles are not provided for either version). The presentation of the earlier version is decent enough given its 16mm origins and the lack of restoration. The 1986 STV documentary *Sarah's Story* profiles the Gateway Exchange scheme for rehabilitating offenders, founded by Boyle and his wife Sarah after his release.

THE SKULL

Freddie Francis; UK 1965; Eureka/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 83 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: interviews with Jonathan Rigby and Kim Newman, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The second bid by Amicus (after *Dr Terror's House of Horrors*) to usurp Hammer's territory, *The Skull* is distinctly under-plotted, as both Jonathan Rigby and Kim Newman note in their interviews here. "A collector acquires the skull of the Marquis de Sade and it destroys him" – that, as Rigby observes, is about it. But it hardly matters, since director Freddie Francis ingeniously fleshes out producer/screenwriter Milton Subotsky's thin script (adapted from a short story by Robert Bloch) with a prowling camera that explores every detail of Scott Simon's intricately *objet*-strewn sets.

In some ways, the sparse script even helps. There's little clumsy exposition, apart from Patrick Wymark's sleazy dealer having to give a potted biog of the Marquis. And having virtually no dialogue for the final 15 minutes allows Peter Cushing to demonstrate just how powerfully he could convey extreme emotions with purely non-verbal means. Christopher Lee, guest-starring in four fairly brief scenes, as ever plays off his co-star with practised aplomb. And Elisabeth Lutyens's atonal score enhances the eerie mood, especially in an unnervingly Pinteresque nightmare sequence – which is all the more effective for not being announced as such.

Disc: A fine 1080p restoration makes the most of DP John Wilcox's dark-toned palette. Rigby and Newman provide fluent expert background, and in the booklet Vic Pratt muses on de Sade's rehabilitation: today, it seems, his name graces a range of premium-priced luxury goods including scented candles. The booklet also includes the press pack for the original release, full of delightfully cheesy publicity suggestions, among them a 'Coffin Contest' and 'The Skull Stomp'.

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (1)

Television

AN ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE

Paul Ciappessoni; UK 1978; BBC/Simply Entertainment/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 144 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

In Philip Mackie's scriptwriting CV, this odd drama sits shortly after *The Naked Civil Servant* (John Hurt as a flamboyantly gay Quentin Crisp) and his slick *Raffles* (Anthony Valentine as the amateur cracksman) and just before his version of Francis Iles's *Malice Aforethought*, in which Hywel Bennett gave one of his best performances, playing a deceptively meek, dull suburban poisoner. So you could take it as part of a personal cycle of dramas concerned with English conformity and the strains it fails to cope with. But it's noticeable that it appeared the year after the Orwellian *1990*, in which Edward Woodward struggled against a leftist-totalitarian British government, and the same year that *Blake's 7* began: science-fiction dramas suffused with anxiety about authoritarian government.

An Englishman's Castle comes on all bland and reassuring – the DVD cover features Kenneth More in a brown cardigan, for heaven's sake – and it is a while before the context for the blandness becomes clear: this is also science-fiction, an alternative-history drama set in a world in which Britain lost the war and is now a cowed German dependency. The title's echo of Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* is presumably intentional; the thematic similarity to Len Deighton's *SS-GB*, published the same year, must be an accident.

More plays the writer of a somewhat dull but hugely successful and long-running TV costume drama, also called *An Englishman's Castle*, which is based largely on his own pre-war youth. He has now reached the point in the story where he must decide how to portray invasion and resistance; crises at work and in his personal life drive him to reconsider his complaisant attitude to German rule, the very British reticence that forbids mention of the fate of the Jews.

This is clever casting – the epitome of cheery British wartime stoicism placed in a context that makes keeping calm and carrying on less of a virtue – and More does catch a late-middle-aged puzzlement, an anxiety that his choices might have been surrenders in disguise. But he doesn't manage any real sense of jeopardy, and the drama doesn't quite shed that initial blandness; it grips, but inconsistently. Isla Blair is excellent as the young actress who shakes More's tree; and it's interesting to see Nigel Havers embody rebellious youth.

Disc: Good transfer of studio-bound taped original. No extras.

ITV 60

UK 1956; Network/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 2,400 minutes approximately; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

This slightly belated celebration of ITV's diamond jubilee, initially available only from Network's online shop, consists of a dozen discs of individual episodes from series broadcast throughout the channel's history (though I think the most recent is a 1994 episode of *Soldier Soldier*). Each disc is themed, supposedly, to give an evening's entertainment – in other words, there's no chronological or thematic logic, which can be irritating: different qualities of engagement are demanded by the first-ever episode of Richard Greene's *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955) and John Pilger's classic 1979 documentary on Pol Pot's genocide in Cambodia; and episodes of *Rising Damp* and *Upstairs, Downstairs* don't aid the transition.

That said, the collection is crammed with enjoyable things, many of them new to DVD, from obvious nostalgia fodder (*Coronation Street*, *Morse*, *Tiswas*, *The Prisoner*) to half-remembered hits (*Public Eye*, *Man at the Top*, *Ace of Wands*), to pleasing obscurities (*Crane*, the clerical sitcom *Our Man at St Mark's* and an episode of *The Arthur Haynes Show* featuring a then-unknown Michael Caine). An ITV opening-night preview is a worthwhile bonus, and I was glad that idents for the various ITV regional companies have been left intact at the start of programmes. Some adverts would have been nice.

Disc: Given the variety of sources, the quality is as good as you could reasonably expect. It is mildly frustrating that programmes aren't subdivided into chapters.

Dag The title character endures blind dates thanks to alcohol and tranquillisers from an army of Pez dispensers he keeps in his bathroom cupboard

DAG, SEASON 1

Oystein Karlsen; Norway 2010; Arrow/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 232 minutes; 16:9

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Naturally one hates to stereotype, but this is in many ways what one would expect of a sitcom from the land of Ibsen and Knausgård: dark, sometimes gruesome, studded with bleak insights into the futility of human communication and the inevitability of death and unhappiness, and refusing to be trammelled by bourgeois conceptions of the sexually appropriate. Each episode begins with an aphorism that sums up its mood – for example, "Nobody says it, but as time goes by there's less reason to feel sorry for the dead."

Atle Antonsen plays the title role, a couples therapist who believes humans are happier alone (90 per cent of his clients split up after the first session – not a healthy business model). He lives by his own rules, with little social contact except for his friend Benedikt – a sex-addicted magnet for humiliation and violence – his sister Marianne and the blind dates she insists on sending him on. These he endures thanks to alcohol and tranquillisers from an army of Pez dispensers he keeps in his bathroom cupboard. Then Marianne sets him up with her friend Eva, who can't tell a lie without puking, and is apparently charmed or challenged by Dag's self-sufficiency...

In an American or British sitcom, the trajectory would be clear, the scripts would be pushing us to root for Dag and Eva. But this is attractively ambiguous: you're allowed to feel that Dag's well-worked-out lifestyle could be worth sticking with. Some of the gags are too broad, some half thought-through, some just (at least, I think this is the problem) too darn Norwegian; but the hit-rate is steady enough to keep you going.

Disc: Crisp picture and sound. In Norwegian with English subtitles.

New releases

SOLEIL ROUGE (RED SUN)

Terence Young; France/Italy/Spain 1971; StudioCanal/Region B/2 Blu-ray/DVD; Certificate 15; 115 minutes; 1.85:1

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Outlaw partners Link (Charles Bronson) and Gauche (Alain Delon), outwardly as charming as Butch and Sundance but actually murderously selfish, hold up a train crossing the Wild West and steal a gold-handled samurai sword intended by the Japanese ambassador as a gift to the president. Gauche double-crosses Link and leaves him for dead, taking off with the prize. Samurai Kuroda (Mifune Toshiro) forces Link to lead him to his ex-partner, though they disagree about the length of time Gauche is to be left alive while Link tortures the whereabouts of the loot from him. En route, gun-toting outlaw and sword-wielding samurai learn about each other – with the seemingly alien Japanese constantly surprising the confident American with his skills in fighting, drinking and lovemaking. However, in the cynical mode of the early 1970s, Link is always ready to ditch Kuroda and head off on his own, even though it means the Japanese will have to disembowel himself in shame.

A high-concept East-meets-West movie of decidedly mixed parentage, it's directed with an eye for the landscape by Bond veteran Terence Young, who pitches American, Japanese and French icons Bronson, Mifune and Delon into a Budd Boetticher-esque tale of betrayal and survival on the trail. It's rather dubious that the 'civilised' killers unite in the climax when 'savage' Indians besiege them, as the code of bushido doesn't extend to the Comanche. Mifune has less to work with here than in 1968's *Hell in the Pacific*, his other enemies-unite-to-survive excursion, but he is effortlessly cool as the superhuman warrior, bathing in an ice pond or slicing a mosquito in half with a swipe of his sword

Disc: No extras.

SPARROWS CAN'T SING

Joan Littlewood; UK 1962; StudioCanal/Region 2 Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 92 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: BFI Q&A with Barbara Windsor and Murray Melvin, interviews with Murray Melvin and Peter Rankin, locations featurette

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Never too bothered about the cinema ("Film is peripheral"), Joan Littlewood adapted Stephen Lewis's chirpy play about an East End merchant seaman searching for his errant wife because it would be "easy". Though vexed by the aesthetic conservatism of her crew (she ordered veteran DP Max Greene to "stop giving me these pretty shots"), she created a lively, fleet-footed paean to community spirit, slum housing and cockney cheerfulness.

A romanticised snapshot of a lost London of knees-up pubs and gossipy street life, the rambling if slender plot provides a fine showcase for Littlewood's Theatre Workshop actors. The joshing, restless scenes teem with future 70s sitcom stars, including Arthur Mullard and Yootha Joyce. Lewis himself, cameoing as the officious janitor of a brutalist tower block ("We're trying to civilise you people"), became best known as the lugubrious Blakey in *On the Buses*. Barbara Windsor, pert and charmingly manipulative as she pings between stolid lover and risky spouse, shows a range here undreamt of in her *Carry On* career. Trotting swiftly through the cobbled streets to meet James Booth's roguish Charlie, she is freshness personified, the Mile End Road's answer to Marilyn Monroe.

Disc: The Blu-ray transfer shows off both the pearly tower blocks and the sooty streets, and the restoration has subtly improved the previously rather iffy sound quality. Richard Dacre's location featurette is solid, though even the then new tower blocks have now been demolished. Windsor and Melvin are a fine Q&A double act, recalling their helpless laughter at finding the cockney slang rendered in 'proper' English subtitles in a New York cinema.

TRACK THE MAN DOWN

R.G. Springsteen; UK 1955; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray; 75 minutes; 1.66:1

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Made in Britain in 1955 by Republic Pictures, Hollywood-based specialists in cowboys and cliffhangers, this is an odd, misshapen combination of crime B-movie and soap opera, and an unusual directorial credit for R.G. Springsteen, who would later become known for his 1960s run of late-in-the-day, long-in-the-tooth B-westerns.

Like those pictures, this is an ensemble round-up of mixed-ability character actors, but it also tries to be an *Asphalt Jungle*/*Killing*-style thieves-fall-out-after-a-heist movie, a proto-disaster film with a disparate group of characters packed aboard a vehicle in peril (a coach from London Victoria to Southampton) and a snappy quota quickie with a Yank import (Kent Taylor, the sort of thin-moustached, ageing juvenile you'd hire if Brian Donlevy and Cesar Romero were out of your budget range) as a wisecracking reporter shaking up staid Fleet Street as he tries to move out of showbiz reporting and into the crime headlines.

A hold-up at the dog track goes awry when unstable Rick Lambert (George Rose) kills a guard. He leaves the loot with his brittle girlfriend Mary (Ursula Howells, in tartan slacks) but her disapproving younger sister June (Petula Clark) winds up bringing it via coach to a botched rendezvous, with Taylor's reporter, John Ford, hopping aboard to follow the story. Other passengers include a twitchy crook sidekick (Kenneth Griffith, in a masterclass of squirming), a runaway stage star (Renee Houston) and her agent (Charles Lloyd Pack), an ailing baby and an excruciating comedy drunk. In hot pursuit down shady country roads are a dedicated if middle-aged motorcycle cop, Lambert's betrayed confederates (Walter Rilla, Michael Balfour) and a plodding inspector (Lloyd Lamble). Everyone holes up in an abandoned boathouse overnight, and things come to a head with a shootout in the morning.

The film has workable suspense situations but keeps cutting away from them to tidy up plot ends, bring on superfluous characters or (most unfortunately) try a comic turn or two. An array of British acting talent does wonders with throwaway moments – Howells, Houston, Balfour and Lloyd Pack in particular – and a lot of location shooting shows off seedy or matter-of-fact views of London and the sylvan splendours of the Victoria-to-Southampton route.

Disc: Olive's Region A Blu-ray goes with a 1.66:1 aspect ratio and offers a decent transfer of this extremely marginal title.

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (1)

Sparrows Can't Sing A lively paean to community spirit… a romanticised snapshot of a lost London of knees-up pubs and gossipy street life

Lost and found

A BROTHER AND HIS YOUNGER SISTER

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Even a foggy online viewing reveals Shimazu Yasujirô's family drama to be a classic of 1930s cinema, fully the equal of Ozu

By Brad Stevens

Two contradictory propositions:

1. Cinema is the artform most prey to the ravages of time and neglect, the meticulously crafted visual patterns of perfectionist auteurs regularly sabotaged by poor-quality prints and less-than-optimal screening conditions.

2. Cinema is a remarkably resilient artform, capable of overcoming what should theoretically be crippling obstacles.

I found myself considering these hypotheses while watching Shimazu Yasujirô's *A Brother and His Younger Sister* (*Ani to sono imoto*, 1939). Like the bulk of Shimazu's oeuvre – almost 100 titles produced between 1922 and the director's early death from lung cancer in 1945 – this film is now seldom shown and has never been released on DVD.

Fortunately, it is one of five Shimazus that have been subtitled in English by enthusiastic amateurs and made available online. However, the subtitles are merely adequate and the picture so dark it occasionally becomes difficult to either work out what is happening on screen or identify characters whose faces are a blur. Yet, even seen under these circumstances, *A Brother and His Younger Sister* is clearly among the finest Japanese films of the 1930s, fully the equal of acknowledged masterpieces by Mizoguchi or Ozu.

The narrative focuses on Mamiya Keisuke (Saburi Shin), a salaryman living with his wife Akiko (Miyake Kuniko) and his younger sister Fumiko (Kuwano Michiko). Keisuke hopes that Fumiko will accept a marriage proposal from his company director's nephew, Michio, something he puts to her during a trip to the mountains. Fumiko rejects Michio's offer, giving as her rationale the likelihood that people will accuse Keisuke of using his sister to obtain a promotion. But the real reason for her decision is suggested by a gesture that immediately precedes this conversation: Fumiko, dressed pragmatically in masculine clothes, playfully declares that "Mount Fuji is on my hand," and holds up her right palm before Keisuke's face, telling him to close one eye. The next shot, taken from Keisuke's perspective, shows Mount Fuji framed so that it apparently rests neatly in Fumiko's hand.

Classical Japanese cinema was frequently concerned with the problem of female autonomy in a rigidly patriarchal culture, and *A Brother and His Younger Sister* strikingly anticipates Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949), made exactly a decade later but under very different conditions, the US occupation having supposedly introduced concepts of democracy and gender equality into Japan. Shimazu, like Ozu, believes that his heroine will be happier if she remains single, and the scene of Fumiko's birthday party, at which not a single male is present, strikes a tone of sad longing (Fumiko and her three unmarried guests sing, while the married Akiko looks on silently) which stresses the beauty and ephemerality of a female community that can only exist outside patriarchy. Tellingly, it is during this scene that Fumiko cuts her finger on the flowers sent by Michio.

Out of the shadows: *A Brother and His Younger Sister*

A sequence in the mountains is among the most beautiful to be found in any Japanese film of the pre-war period

Although Fumiko, who works as a typist, complains to her boss about how "a woman's fate is to end up at home", the image of her 'holding' Mount Fuji shows her revelling in a feeling of power and control. As those shots of her staring at the mountains while considering Michio's proposal suggest, the reason she subsequently gives for refusing to marry is specious, her actual motivation being a reluctance to surrender the independence and freedom she enjoys as a working woman. If *Late Spring* is often misread as being about a father who sacrifices himself so that his daughter can find happiness in marriage (an interpretation the film in no way supports, Ozu's point being that both father and daughter will be miserable as a result of bowing to social pressures), *A Brother and His Younger Sister*'s mountain sequence seems to be actively misleading audiences (or at least censors), its dialogue indicating one thing while its images imply something quite different.

This sequence is certainly among the most beautiful to be found in any Japanese film of the pre-war period, yet thanks to the state of currently circulating prints, an excursion surely taking place in bright sunlight appears to have been scheduled for a particularly foggy day. *A Brother and His Younger Sister* cries out for a restoration which, given the film's marginal reputation, it is unlikely to receive. Yet restoration would be required for Shimazu's film to achieve the classic status it richly deserves.

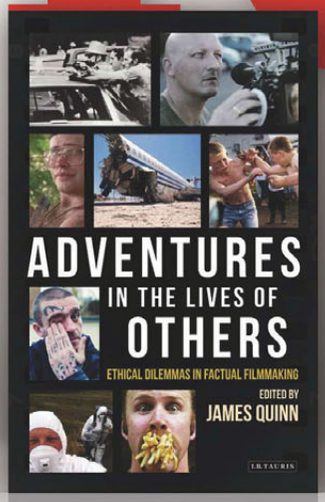
A vicious circle, perhaps. But cinephiles have traditionally welcomed challenges and are often prepared to travel vast distances to catch rare screenings. In the internet era, the only journey one need make to view *A Brother and His Younger Sister* is to YouTube (where all five subtitled Shimazus can be found), and if the condition of the transfer poses a challenge of a rather different sort – we must, as it were, meet the film halfway – it is a challenge well worth accepting.

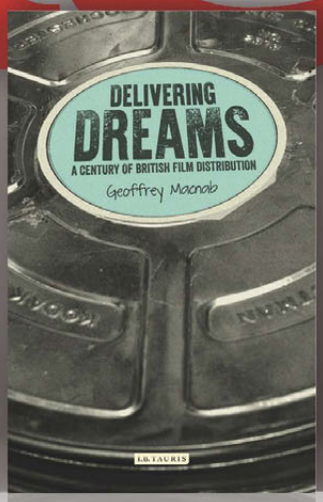
WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

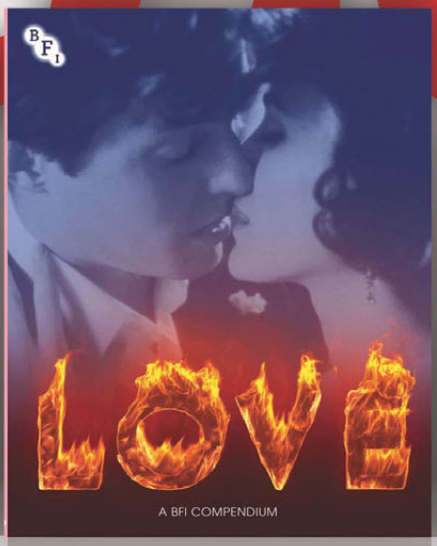
'Shimazu's best films employed a subtle social criticism... as late as 1939, *An Older Brother and His Younger Sister* displayed clear feminist sympathies in its treatment of the heroine's rejection of a marriage proposal and satirised the unfriendly world of Tokyo business... probably [Shimazu's] masterpiece, [the film] displayed a pleasing integrity of tone and style, and its best scenes rivalled Ozu in their tender serenity'

Alexander Jacoby 'A Critical Handbook of Japanese Film Directors', 2008

Read







ADVENTURES IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Ethical Dilemmas in Factual Filmmaking

Edited by James Quinn, I.B. Tauris, 256pp, paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9781784533946

Putting readers into the shoes of the TV professionals, *Adventures in the Lives of Others* brings together an extraordinary range of intimate, candid accounts of the ethical struggles and decisions involved in making documentary film and television. Contributors include legends of the documentary world, eminent filmmakers at the top of their game, emerging directors and producers, and some of the world's most powerful and respected executives. In specially commissioned pieces, they explore the ethical dilemmas involved in uncovering secrets and breaking taboos, accessing closed and dangerous worlds, fighting injustice, filming raw sex and violence, and documenting acts of evil, and the many challenges of turning real life into compelling entertainment.

www.ibtauris.com

DELIVERING DREAMS

A Century of British Film Distribution

By Geoffrey Macnab, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781784534899

Film distributors are the unsung heroes of cinema. Drawing on the archives of the Film Distributors' Association (FDA), as well as on interviews with leading British distributors today, *Delivering Dreams* tells the largely unacknowledged story of how films are brought to British cinema-goers. It profiles some of the most flamboyant and controversial figures of the last 100 years, and explores how the sector has reacted to changes in attitudes and technology, from the transition to sound in the late 1920s to the move to digital in the 2000s. Ranging from the films of Charlie Chaplin to *The King's Speech*, and published to coincide with the centenary of the FDA's creation, this book highlights the crucial role distributors have played in maintaining the solid foundations of the British film industry.

www.ibtauris.com

LOVE

A BFI Compendium

Edited by James Bell, BFI, 160pp, paperback, illustrated, £16.99, ISBN 9781844579365

Since the birth of cinema, stories of love and romance have been its beating heart. From romantic epics to screwball comedy, Bollywood musicals to dark tales of obsession and desire, explore cinema's love affair with love in the fifth edition of the BFI's unique series of Compendium publications. With contributions from leading film critics and writers, including Molly Haskell, David Thomson, Mark Cousins, Hannah McGill, Pamela Hutchinson, J. Hoberman, Neil Brand, Dan Callahan, Guy Lodge, Imogen Sara Smith, Tim Robey, Geoff Andrew, Rachel Dwyer, Ashley Clark and many more.

tinyurl.com/pr8xssl

DEAD OF NIGHT

By Jez Conolly & David Owain Bates, Auteur/Devil's Advocates, 120pp, paperback, illustrated, £9.99, ISBN 9780993238437

Released just days after the end of World War II and a dozen years before the first full-blooded Hammer horror, the Ealing Studios anthology *Dead of Night* is now regarded as a keystone in the architecture of horror cinema. Yet for a film that packs such a reputation, this Devil's Advocate is the first time a single book has been dedicated to it. It navigates a 'road map' through the film's individual stories, including its linking narrative, and considers the many themes that they provoke, including an appraisal of the film in the very English tradition of the festive ghost story. The book includes a selection of rarely seen production illustrations by the film's acclaimed designer, Michael Relph.

www.facebook.com/DevilsAdvocatesbooks

Books

Cabin fever: *The Charlie Chaplin Archives* aims to draw out the creative process behind his films by offering a visual and oral history of their production

IN THE LIMELIGHT

THE CHARLIE CHAPLIN ARCHIVES

Edited by Paul Duncan, Taschen, 560pp, £135, ISBN 9783836538435

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Measuring 16 inches by 12 inches, and another two inches thick, with a gold-lacquered board cover and 900 images spread across 560 pages, *The Charlie Chaplin Archives* is a monument to its subject. That the diminutive Chaplin should be honoured by such an immense book speaks to his industry stature, his talent, his fame, and also to the breadth of the market for movie memorabilia.

Taschen's doorstop of a book aims to draw out the creative process behind Chaplin's films, being a visual and oral history of their production, but truth be told, this is not a purely intellectual exercise. The first, generous, print run of this souvenir volume comes accompanied by a strip of 12 frames from a 35mm print of *City Lights*. On the pages themselves, the collation of family photographs, yellowing letters, vintage posters and curios from the archives makes this a deluxe fan memento as much as a book that one might attempt to sit down and read from start to finish.

To begin with, you would need strong arms to cradle this beauty in your lap. And second, the luxurious page layouts are endlessly distracting. It is far easier to gaze at the images, or meander through the pull quotes, than to travel from A to B. Snippets from Chaplin's own autobiographical writings are interspersed with factual commentary from film scholars, news clippings, or quotations from his collaborators, co-workers and family. These contributions are often brutally revealing: a succession of leading ladies recall his eccentric, if effective methods, while Marlon Brando describes working on *A Countess from Hong Kong* (1966) as "chess at 90 mph".

The 560 pages feature photos, letters and curios

Painful or not, the stories of how Chaplin worked his magic in front of the lens are enthralling to read. He was quite secretive about the creative process, the way he improvised on camera, and happily shot and reshot until plots were transformed and scenes in no way resembled their originals. And for every line here from Chaplin maintaining, say, that he was "unconscious" in character, you can read Stan Laurel, Mack Sennett, Paulette Goddard, et al, trying to pin down what made him so scene-stealingly brilliant – not to mention the film notes and scripts that were typed up along the way, which are reproduced on several pages.

And if you were in any doubt of Chaplin's brilliance, his sweetness, agility and grace are here revealed in still images from his great films. Even frozen on the page, his smirking features and the kick of his feet reveal the mischievous charm of the Little Tramp.

In fact, the words are surrounded by a barrage of pictures, some incredibly rare, some iconic, printed at such vast size that images one has previously squinted at seem suddenly as expansive as a movie screen. This means that you can pore over the detail in the production design for *The Great Dictator* (1940), but can also see the face of a juvenile Chaplin on the variety stage as 'an Irish plumber' in 1906. The monochrome images outshine the colour ones, printed in a silver duotone that creates a shimmering cinematic effect. Plus, each picture is so fully annotated that one could learn plenty just by following this visual trail through the archives.

Browsing 'The Charlie Chaplin Archives' is more akin to wandering around a museum than to reading a biography

In all, browsing *The Charlie Chaplin Archives* is more akin to wandering around a museum than to reading a biography. It is an exercise in star-gazing and fan worship taken to extremes, with virtually every aspect of Chaplin's career laid out to be picked over. You could devote a cold winter to getting the most out of this text, with happy pauses for film screenings at the end of each chapter. That this lavish and expensive volume pays tribute to a man born into poverty, whose characters were always downtrodden and down on their luck, may strike you as odd, or simply sweet revenge. Chaplin called it the "vulgar touch" and made his fortune turning the humble circumstances of his childhood into universal stories that inspire fellowship and humanity. Nearly 40 years after his death there is a devoted fanbase keeping the Chaplin industry in business, who are fascinated by, and willing to fork out for, every titbit of information about their idol.

It is hard from this distance for us to resist using the well-worn phrase, but Chaplin refused to describe his life story as a rags-to-riches tale. This covetable book might claim that title though, alchemically spinning the scraps of Chaplin's working life into publishing gold.

ADVENTURES IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Ethical Dilemmas in Factual Filmmaking

Edited by James Quinn, I.B. Tauris, £14.99, 256pp, ISBN: 9781784533946

Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Documentary was a compromised form from the very beginning. As John Ellis's short historical preface to this collection of pieces from leading contemporary filmmakers points out, in making *Nanook of the North* (1922), pioneer Robert Flaherty "violated almost all the ethical standards that guide today's filmmakers". He even "fathered a child with one of the women he was working with".

Almost a century later the 30 documentary practitioners (including commissioning editors) interviewed here are all agonising over the ethical choices involved in 'factual' filmmaking. What becomes apparent from their accounts is that there is no established code of practice. They need to define their own boundaries of right and wrong.

US director Alex Gibney (*Taxi to the Dark Side, We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks*) advocates complete frankness on the part of the filmmaker: "The one thing I've learned is to put the dilemmas you encounter into the films you make." He suggests letting the audience know that the search for truth is "a process" that is often tortuous and uncomfortable.

One perennial question is just how involved the filmmakers should become in the stories they are telling. Should they intervene to save the gang member about to be shot in front of them? This was a dilemma faced by Dan Reed on location in a township in South Africa in 1993. "We're gonna kill him. Get your camera!" one of his subjects told him. On a more banal level, what should the filmmaker shooting a documentary about dogging do when a couple start having sex against the bonnet of his car? ("'Dear God, be quick,' I thought. 'Really don't want you to scratch my car,'" Leo Maguire remembers of an awkward moment during the shooting of his 2013 film *Dogging Tales*, which was nominated for a Grierson Award.)

The Maysles brothers shooting *Grey Gardens*

There are questions that tug at the filmmakers' consciences at every step of the filmmaking process. The book's editor James Quinn includes a chapter on a film he developed but never made, about a former child prodigy once proclaimed "the greatest genius on earth". Quinn tracked the boy down, encountering a young man who was studying for a degree, had a girlfriend and had finally "brought a little hard-won normality into his life". Whether he was a genius or not, Quinn decided that making a film would disrupt that normality, and quietly shelved the project.

Dave Nath gives a grimly compelling account of the making of *Brian's Story* (2001), a *Cutting Edge* documentary for Channel 4 about a one-time hotshot ad industry journalist, fallen on very hard times. Brian Davis, who was living homeless in London, had agreed to be in Nath's film but was vulnerable and mentally ill. The question of his real "capacity to consent" still clearly bothers the filmmaker long after the death of the subject.

Chapters range across issues such as "taboo subjects", "incendiary issues", "aftercare" and the "greater good". One small quibble is that the majority of the contributors are drawn from British television – there is little acknowledgement of world documentary. The 'ethical dilemmas' don't always seem that pressing either. Asif Kapadia's desire to use only archive footage in *Senna* (2010), for example, is hardly a matter of life and death.

What should the filmmaker shooting a documentary about dogging do when a couple start having sex against his car?

Still, the book features fascinating contributions from US directors. The late Albert Maysles reflects on how he and his brother came to make their classic *Grey Gardens* (1975): "Films should never hurt anyone; the act of filming someone's life should be an act of love," he says. Morgan Spurlock talks about humour as a tool in factual filmmaking. Barbara Kopple reminisces about *Harlan County U.S.A.* (1976), her doc about a coal-mining strike, and Steve James looks back on his very long-standing relationships with the subjects of his films *Hoop Dreams* (1994) and *Stevie* (2002).

One of the best and rawest chapters is Penny Woolcock's essay, 'Violence', in which she looks back on the controversy caused by her dog-fighting doc *Going to the Dogs* (2014). She received vicious criticism online for making the doc, but points out that other forms of violence, for example drones or military aircraft dropping 1,000lb bombs, are considered "civilised".

Adventures in the Lives of Others should make a useful practical primer for documentary makers, many of whom are likely to face exactly the same dilemmas as its contributors. For the general reader, it offers honest and heartfelt insight into the stories behind some of the best documentaries in recent years.

DAVID LEAN

By Melanie Williams, Manchester University Press, 269pp, £70, ISBN 9780719073854

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

David Lean needs rescuing. That much is clear right from Melanie Williams's introduction, in which she chides certain critics – mostly British – for attitudes to Lean's work ranging from lukewarm to downright dismissive. *Sight & Sound* isn't exempt: Williams singles out a piece from the July 2008 issue, covering the director's centenary, in which Nick James "damned him with faint praise" by suggesting that "Lean's films are more complex in their craftsmanship than in their conception". Elsewhere she cites the widespread view that the early, relatively small-scale films, including his much-praised Dickens adaptations – *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948) – are just fine, but that once he embarked on big-budget widescreen international epics he became, as David Thomson put it, "lost in the sense of his own pictorial grandeur". Or, as the popular critical jibe had it, Lean ran to fat.

Williams sets out to refute what she sees as these unwarranted judgements, not least the common view of Lean as an "essentially cold" director. On the contrary, she detects in his films a strong emotional undercurrent and, rather unexpectedly, a distinct feminine angle in much of his work. She quotes Alain Silver and James Ursini's study, *David Lean and His Films*, as reckoning that of his 16 films, six have "preeminent female protagonists"; while several more feature strong female roles – *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) being the prime exceptions. Even if in his personal life, as she concedes, "Lean is not necessarily an obvious director to be co-opted into feminism, given his inveterate womanising," she still feels that "there is compelling evidence for his strong identification with a number of his female protagonists".

In this spirit, Williams pays particular regard to some of Lean's more neglected films such as *The Passionate Friends* (1948), *Madeleine* (1950) and, most notably, *Summer Madness* (aka *Summertime*, 1955), all of them female-led dramas. She devotes more pages to *Summer Madness* than to any of the other films except *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) and *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), noting that Lean named it as the work into which he had "put more of myself... than any other I've ever made". By contrast, she rejects the director's dismissal of *Madeleine* as "the worst film I ever made", finding it "one of his most rich and resonant female-focussed films".

In her final chapter, 'Feminising the epic', Williams mounts a valiant defence of *Ryan's Daughter*, though she can't quite clear it of the charge of flatulence, and makes the best case she can for Lean's swansong, *A Passage to India* (1984),

Take it to the bridge: David Lean

while noting "a certain imperial tendency in Lean's epic mode of filmmaking". Interestingly, given that even the director's severest critics concede his exceptional craftsmanship, especially as an editor, she devotes relatively little space to the technical side of his films, the cutting, lighting and deployment of the camera. Instead, this is essentially a thematic study of Lean's work, tracing recurrent emotional and psychological patterns throughout his *oeuvre* – and in doing so, drawing worthwhile attention to several of his lesser-known films.

THE CLASSICAL MEXICAN CINEMA

The Poetics of the Exceptional Golden Age Films

By Charles Ramírez Berg; University of Texas Press; 254pp; hardback, $75, ISBN 9781477302514; paperback, $24.95, ISBN 9781477308059

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

In Charles Ramírez Berg's scholarly book addressing the Mexican *Cine de Oro* ('Golden Age'), he defines the period as encompassing a stretch from the mid-30s to late 50s during which Mexico was the undisputed cinematic capital of the Latin American world. This fits with accepted definition, though Berg has some terms of his own to add, dividing the films of the era into two categories, dubbed the 'mainstream Mexican cinema' (MMC) and the 'classical Mexican cinema' (CMC).

Berg's study focuses on the latter works, those he believes break with the MMC's imitation of Hollywood and European models, aligning themselves instead with a culture-wide imperative on the part of Mexican artists and intellectuals to develop modes of expression that would embody *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness), in the process compiling a set of distinct visual tropes that subsequent generations could either adopt, reject or repurpose, but would always have to reckon with. Berg describes the mission of the CMC – as he sees it epitomised in the 1940s films of Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández and his unit of repeat collaborators, including director of photography Gabriel Figueroa – as forging "a uniquely Mexican style to tell Mexican stories, about Mexicans, for Mexicans".

Berg's analysis, somewhat drily written but generously illustrated with screenshots and other relevant images, links the CMC's pursuit of *mexicanidad* to the work of trailblazers in other visual media, notably the penny-press printmaker José Guadalupe Posada, whose development of the maguey plant as a visual icon was picked up by Sergei Eisenstein on his ill-starred yet hugely influential *¡Que viva México!* shoot, and the landscape artist Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo Cornado), whose rounded, encompassing 'curvilinear' perspective, Berg posits, offered a uniquely Mexican alternative to the European linear perspective.

Berg focuses on those works he believes break with mainstream Mexican cinema's imitation of Hollywood and European models

Emilio Fernández's *María Candelaria*

These points of comparison will be familiar to anyone who has had occasion to see 'Under the Mexican Sky: Gabriel Figueroa, Art and Film', a travelling gallery show (with accompanying catalogue) which originated at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City in 2008 and has recently been making the rounds in the US, situating the images that Figueroa created for the likes of Fernández, Luis Buñuel and Julio Bracho within the broader visual culture of the day. If some aspects of Berg's stated approach of 'neoformalist' visual analysis, after the model of film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, retread familiar territory, there is nevertheless valuable contextualising information to be found here, particularly in the chapters dealing with Enrique Rosas's pre-*Cine de Oro The Grey Car* (1919) and Fernando de Fuentes's 'Revolution Trilogy', or in passages outlining the circumstances which began and ended the *Cine de Oro*. (The coming of sound cinema and the stymieing of upcoming young talent, respectively.)

The dichotomy Berg develops between the MMC and CMC, however, feels limiting and rather Manichean, and though I can't claim anything like the author's expertise in Mexican film history, what I've seen at recent retrospectives such as the New York Museum of Modern Art's 'Mexico at Midnight' series of *cine negro* (Mexican *film noir*) movies or the Locarno Film Festival's tribute to Canadian-born Alex Phillips – with Figueroa, the other premier DP working in Mexico at the time – indicates that there is still much untapped ore in the *Cine de Oro*.

The eighth and final chapter of Berg's primer is devoted to the discussion of three genre films from less well-remembered directors, including Bracho – and one presumes it will be taken as a call for further research rather than the final word.

BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

An unusual design for Bert Williams's 1965 exploitation horror

The *Open Air Bedroom* (1971) poster shows the influence of 60s psychedelia

NICOLAS WINDING REFN: THE ACT OF SEEING

Words by Alan Jones, FAB Press, 324pp, £60, ISBN 9781903254790

Reviewed by Virginie Sélavy

A *magnum opus* of cinematic fetishisation from the director of *Drive* (2011) and *Only God Forgives* (2013), *The Act of Seeing* is a poster book like no other. It originated with a collection of American one-sheets – assembled from the then disreputable Times Square cinemas – which Nicolas Winding Refn bought from writer Jimmy McDonough (biographer of the poetically twisted experimental/exploitation figure Andy Milligan). Joining forces with horror connoisseur Alan Jones, who provides context for each film, Winding Refn decided to present a selection of these posters in a luxurious coffee-table hardback.

Stemming from Winding Refn's obsession with New York's infamous 42nd Street – no longer the exploitation heaven it once was by the time he moved to New York as a child in 1978 – *The Act of Seeing* is an intense meander through a world of frenzied desires and lurid frustration focused on the female: nymphomaniacs, savages, lesbians, starlets, suburban housewives; available or unavailable; uncontrollable or under control; more often than not 'abnormal' or 'forbidden'; and always alluringly nude. The pulpy, sometimes gritty poster designs for titles such as *Hot Blooded Woman* (1965) or *Obscene House* (1969) exude a wired energy that reeks of desperation, with their primary colours, sensational taglines and promises of sex and violence "in voluptuous/scorching/throbbing/blushing/sinner/cunningly contrived color". They encapsulate a time of fast-paced changes revolutionising social mores and filmic boundaries and the smut peddlers' frenetic attempts to keep up and cash in on them.

It is not all pulp, however, and part of the book's appeal lies in the way it documents the variety of inventive poster art of the period. Sophisticated designs are found in the classy chiaroscuro of Joe Sarno's *Passion in Hot Hollows* (1969), the arresting keyhole of *Eye-Ball* (1971), or the mock naive imagery that promises "sadism – quack love – horror" on the brilliantly unusual poster for *The Nest of the Cuckoo Birds* (1965). Curtis Harrington's *Night Tide* (1961) is the only film featured twice, showing how distinct artwork was used to appeal to different audiences: one poster boasts a purple monster on a bright yellow background, the other has romantic ghostly silhouettes in dreamy blue.

Progressing through the images, which are meticulously arranged according to colour, composition and style, the influence of mainstream movies – including *Psycho* (1960), *Blow-Up* (1966) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967) – on some of the titles and designs becomes clear. Contemporary art and the counterculture also had a visible impact, as many of the psychedelic-inflected posters demonstrate, some of them among the most striking in the book: *Open Air Bedroom* (1971) has childlike flowers which, on closer inspection, reveal petals formed of naked women and kissing couples. *Alice in Acidland* (1969) is lost in a spectacularly trippy purple swirl, while *Sock It to Me Baby* (1968) uses the words from the title both to accentuate the curves of its female figure and to preserve her modesty.

Considered trash at the time, the throwaway advertising material for back-alley filth, the posters are revived and revalued here

Aside from a few exceptions – *Snuff* (1975) and *Night Tide* among them – most of the films featured are extremely obscure, with many either difficult to find or entirely lost. Elusive and unattainable, they are lovingly preserved through the only trace that remains of them, treasured as the dream of a dream. Considered trash at the time, the throwaway advertising material for back-alley filth, they are revived and revalued by the lavish presentation of the book. In this manner, the fetishistic posters are themselves fetishised into a beautiful, and obscure, object of desire. Winding Refn's fascinating act of "mythologizing" (his own word in the introduction), the lesson in poster art the book offers, and the door it opens into a forgotten time of unfettered fantasy all make *The Act of Seeing* an artefact worth coveting.

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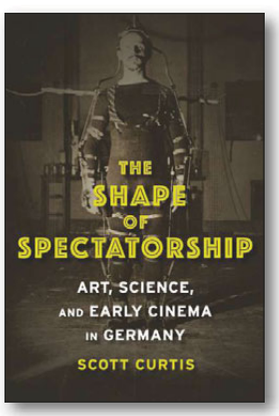

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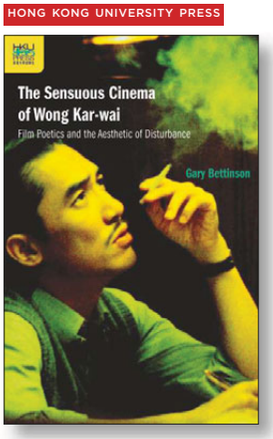

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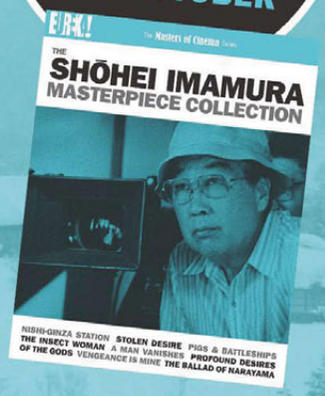

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READERS' LETTERS

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NORSE STAR

Your very excellent list of '100 overlooked films directed by women' (*S&S*, October) is, as you say, "far from definitive" – but not even a passing reference to Anja Breien, one of Norway's best and most successful directors of either gender, acclaimed internationally for *Wives* (*Hustruer*, 1975) and *The Heritage* (*Arven*, 1979)? Was she a Norwegian too far?
Clyde Jeavons *London*

CHERCHEZ LES FEMMES

Knowing that the BFI's middle name is elitism, I hesitated to explore the *Sight & Sound* article on 100 female directors, allowing the cynical voice in my head to assert that they'd never give a second thought to the likes of Danièle Thompson, Anne Fontaine, Nicole Garcia, Agnès Jaoui, Marion Vernoux, Tonie Marshall, Alexandra Leclère, Maiwenn, Eléonore Faucher, Florence Moncorgé-Gabin, Isabelle Mergault, Noémie Lvovsky, Valérie Lemercier, Sophie Marceau, Josiane Balasko, Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, Nadine Trintignant, Diane Kurys – that was just 18 names off the top of my head. A second, more reasonable voice clamoured to be heard and so I opened the magazine and found I was correct: no mention of these female filmmakers who, in the main, ignore the 'sisterhood', have no political agenda and turn out mainstream films, which could as easily have been written and directed by men: films such as *La Bûche*, *Avenue Montaigne*, *Palais royal!*, *Me and My Sister*, *You Are So Beautiful*, *A Common Thread*, *Venus Beauty*, *Empty Days*, *Parlez-moi d'amour*, *Dry Cleaning*, *The Taste of Others*, *Feelings* – a dozen of the most accomplished and entertaining films to emerge from France in the last 20 years or so.

This cavalier approach, which sees the BFI decide what the public should watch rather than listening to what they want, is why people like me are ex-members of the BFI.
L. Nock *London*

THE LADIES VANISH

Although I was pleased to see your '100 overlooked films directed by women' story, I was disappointed that no fewer than 32 of the 100 chosen films were made in the US, and almost half were in English. There were only three films from South America, all rather well-known: *Hour of the Star*, *Oriana* and *Carmen Miranda: Bananas Is My Business*. Presumably, the work of Margot Benacerraf (*Araya*, 1958), Marta Rodríguez, María Luisa Bemberg, Lucrecia Martel and Claudia Llosa is too well-known to be included. But where were Carmen Santos, Gilda de Abreu and Lúcia Murat from Brazil, as well as Venezuelans Solveig Hoogesteijn and Elia K. Schneider, Colombian Camila Loboguerrero, and Argentinians Ana Poliak, Albertina Carri and Celina Murga? I was also surprised not to see any films by Chinese Fifth Generation graduates Li Shaohong or Hu Mei, never mind by the many female directors who have emerged in the country since the 1980s. To do justice to the retrospective, *S&S* should probably have asked the respondents to focus on the world beyond Europe and English-speaking countries.
Peter Rist *Canada*

Editor's note: That there are more than 100 great underappreciated films by women was acknowledged in that issue's editorial. It was a list of overlooked films, not a 'best of' female directors, and many of the mainstream films L. Nock vaunts are excluded by virtue of their availability. The list was not decided by the BFI but by the writers and filmmakers we asked to contribute. Since one ambition of this ongoing project was to start a debate and bring exposure to lesser-seen films, these suggestions are very welcome.

LETTER OF THE MONTH
MAGIC MIRA

I enjoyed your 'Female Gaze' issue (*S&S*, October) but felt that Mira Nair (pictured) had been overlooked. Her debut feature, *Salaam Bombay!* (1988) won the Camera d'Or at Cannes. It is still a provocative film in comparison to contemporary Indian cinema and to have made the film in India as a female director based in America must have been an incredible challenge.

A great inspiration, she very kindly accepted my invitation to see my debut short film about my mother, *A Love Supreme*, which screened before Asif Kapadia's debut feature *The Warrior* (2001) in London. At the Q&A afterwards she reminded us that Irrfan Khan, star of *The Warrior*, had had a small role in *Salaam Bombay!*.
Nilesh Patel London

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

Regarding *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation* (review, *S&S*, October), mention should be made of one of the most impressive action sequences of recent years. Owing plenty to *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, multiple assassins create havoc in a brilliant set piece that not only makes full use of the back stage, orchestra pit and corridors of the Vienna State Opera, but also uses one of the louder passages of *Turandot* in true Hitchcockian fashion.
Terry Hanstock *Nottingham*

CLOSELY OBSERVED TRANS

In Dispatches ('Time for a change', *S&S*, November), Mark Cousins makes a convincing point about cinema's history of transgressing the boundaries, both national and more abstract ones.

But I can't help the feeling that by opening his column with references to two trans women (Lana Wachowski and Caitlyn Jenner), he reduces their lives to a springboard for his extended metaphor, one that goes all the way from transnational film criticism to the refugee crisis.

Metaphors live among words and meanings; three-dimensional trans people live among us. Thankfully, there is a growing body of films and TV programmes that offer varied representations of trans people (*Orange Is the New Black*, *Transparent*, *52 Tuesdays*, *Tangerine*). I believe it will be these works, and not Charlie Chaplin's 'trans' face, that will challenge and change the mainstream perceptions and ignorance of trans lives.
Ania Ostrowska *London*

IN THE COMPANY OF MEN

Your 'Five Key Solo Survival Dramas' featured a somewhat predictable array of bronzed beardies with improvised weapons. For balance, can I suggest a sixth – the wonderful Martina Gedeck (with, of course, the dog Lynx) in Julian Pölsler's extraordinary fable *The Wall* (*Die Wand*, 2011).
Paul Colbeck *London*

Additions and corrections

November p.70 *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*, Certificate 15, 114m 56s; p.64 *Fidelio Alice's Journey*; Certificate 15, 97m 4s; p.77 *Fresh Dressed*, Certificate 15, 82m 42s; p.77 *A Haunting in Cawdor*, Certificate 15, 101m 40s; p.78 *Hellions*, Certificate 15, 78m 16s; p.66 *Letters to Max*, Certificate PG, 103m 12s; p.81 *Listen to Me Marlon*, Certificate 15, 102m 34s; p.93 *They Will Have to Kill Us First*, Certificate 15, 100m 10s

ENDINGS...

THE HEIRESS

Olivia de Havilland's ascent of the staircase while her spurned lover hammers at the door is an act of revenge worthy of Jacobean drama

By Alex Davidson

Catherine Sloper, the titular heiress in William Wyler's 1949 film, delivers two great acts of vengeance simply through the withholding of her presence. In the first, she declines to attend her sick father's deathbed and in the second, at the film's climax, she refuses to answer the door to her potential lover, leaving him to wail her name outside. It's ironic that Catherine's absence is the source of both men's woes as they had shunned her company, and her love, earlier in the film.

The ending of *The Heiress* sees William Wyler's camera follow Olivia de Havilland's Catherine for the second time as she climbs a staircase. On the earlier occasion, she had been jilted by the handsome fortune hunter Morris (Montgomery Clift) after he learned that she was to be disinherited by her disapproving father if the marriage went ahead. The elopement abandoned, a devastated Catherine walks slowly up to her room, clutching her luggage. Her father Dr Austin Sloper (Ralph Richardson), disgusted by her dullness and convinced that Morris is only interested in her fortune, has been proved right and she hates him for it. Even her kind, daffy aunt (Miriam Hopkins) is frustrated by Catherine's naivety ("Oh, dear girl, why were you not a little more clever?"). But when Catherine comes down again, she is a different woman.

Dr Sloper has already helped destroy his daughter's innocence with a diatribe of spite seldom seen in 1940s Hollywood melodramas. Referring to Morris, he snarls at her: "How many girls do you think he might have had in this town? A hundred women are prettier, a thousand more clever, but you have one virtue that outshines them all... Your money... You have nothing else." In their next – and last – brilliantly scripted exchange, Catherine throws his hatred back with twice the force, eyeing his hurt reactions carefully as she constructs phrases that will hurt him the most ("I love him. Does that humiliate you?"). By the end, her father looks terrified – Catherine has become as venomous as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's most barbed characters. Father and daughter will never meet again, despite his dying pleas.

On the surface at least, Morris's punishment is far less severe. Clift plays him as charming and unreadable, at least until the last few minutes. We seldom see him on his own, never witness him consider the hurt he has caused Catherine. Paramount Studios asked the writers to tone down Morris's villainy so audiences wouldn't be completely alienated from Clift, whose star was then in its ascendancy. Morris is selfish, stupid and cowardly, but uncomprehending in the devastating effect of his betrayal. He even dares to try to win her affection a second time. Catherine may have forgiven his previous abandonment, but his audacity in returning for her love warrants retribution ("He came to the wrong house, and he came twice. I shall see that he never comes a third time"). Catherine lets him believe she will marry him, but when he returns she leaves him at the door, crying her name. All he loses is pride and financial security, but Wyler transforms the simple act of not answering the door into an act of revenge worthy of Jacobean drama.

Her father lies dead and unmourned. Morris is penniless and humiliated. But Catherine is redeemed, her dignity restored

The ending to Henry James's *Washington Square*, the film's source novel, is very different. Catherine, we learn, has turned down two other engagements, and when Morris returns after several years he is chubby and balding, and is rebuffed far more politely by the heroine. The plot amendments belong to the 1947 play by Ruth and Augustus Goetz, who expertly trimmed their script for film. One of the most remarkable aspects of *The Heiress* is how, despite the high drama, the confrontations are chillingly calm – Morris's desperate howl at the end is one of the few times we see anyone shout. It may be the only time Clift lets us see a genuine emotion from Morris.

The film won four Oscars: for Best Actress, Best Art Direction, Best Costume Design and Best Score. All these factors play a major part in the final scene, as Catherine climbs the stairs, severing any chance of a life with Morris, dressed in her grand finery, clutching a lamp to light her way to her solitary future, the music turning a potentially tragic decision into a triumphant victory. Its gothic intensity recalls David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1946), although unlike Miss Havisham, de Havilland's jilted lover will not waste any more of her life on self-pity. Her father lies dead and unmourned. Morris is penniless and humiliated. But Catherine is redeemed, her dignity restored. As she climbs the stairs she has never looked stronger. She half-smiles enigmatically. She is free.

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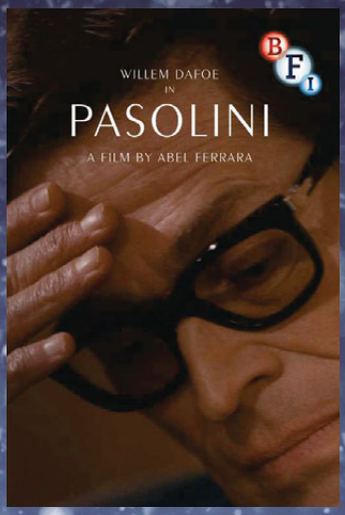

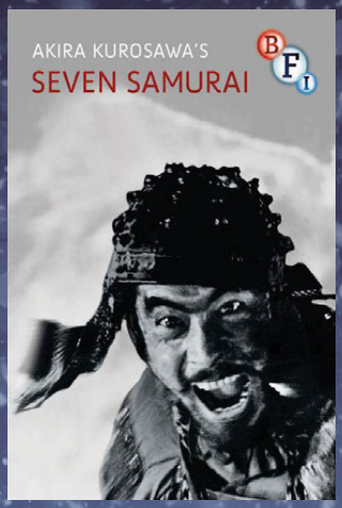

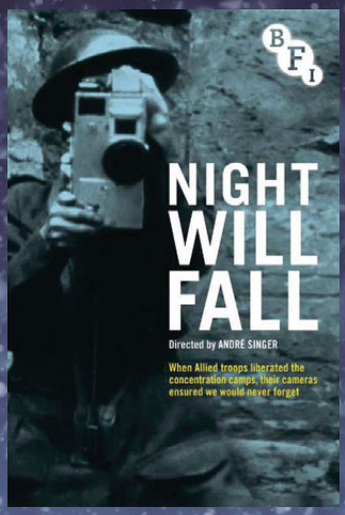

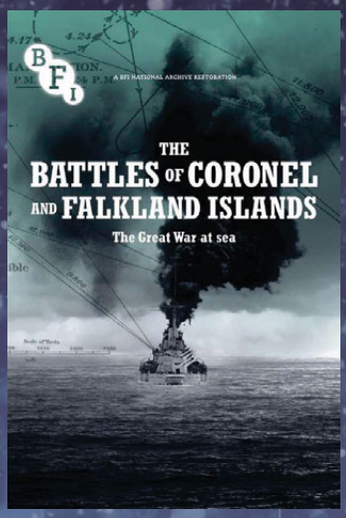

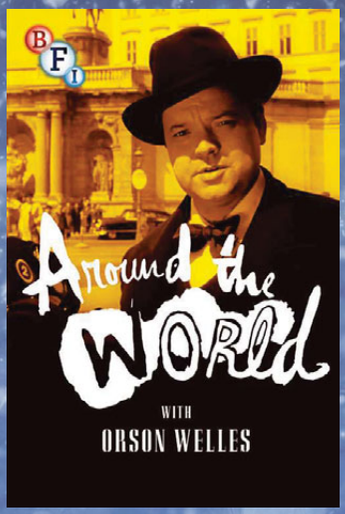

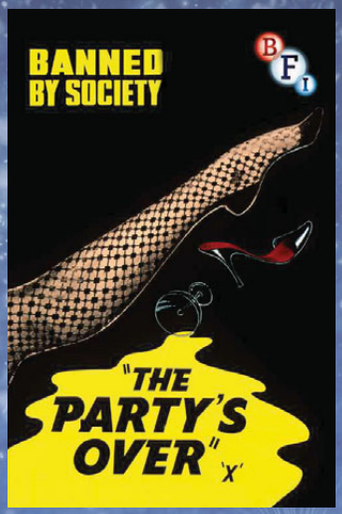

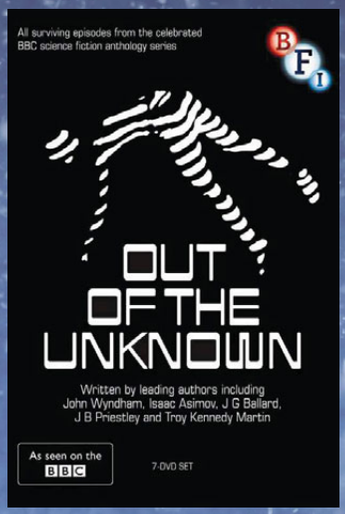

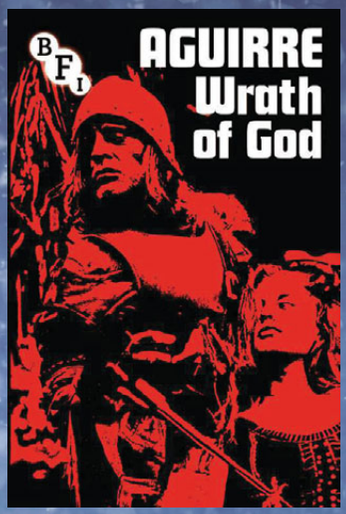

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